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**The Royal Court Theatre 1968-1975: Fraught and Fruitful Years**

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# **The Royal Court Theatre 1968-1975: Fraught and Fruitful Years**

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**DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for a higher degree elsewhere.

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This thesis is dedicated with love to my sister Kate Healy (1976-2015).

## **Abstract**

From the establishment of the English Stage Company at The Royal Court Theatre in 1956 through to the late 1960s, the Court was widely viewed as a champion of theatrical freedoms and progressive ideals, playing a decisive role in the abolition of censorship as exercised by the Lord Chamberlain until 1968. Narratives of the ensuing 1968-1975 period tend to recount an era when the Court fell out of step with contemporary developments in theatre, with blame frequently placed on intergenerational tensions between the Court's established management and a band of emerging male English playwrights who claim to have been unsupported by the theatre at this time.

This study goes against the received scholarly grain concerning these years at the Court, and maps an alternative reading of this narrative. This thesis provides evidence that the Court of the early 1970s experienced a time of significant seed-sowing, that these were years in which the Sloane Square institution experimented with alternative theatre and enthusiastically programmed subaltern and female playwrights, and that this was a move in-step with contemporaneous international trends in theatre. By revealing this understanding of events, the thesis contends that the artistic directorship of Oscar Lewenstein (1972-1975) was a direct reaction against an elitist culture at the Court and an institutional habitus which was rooted in and informed by the decline of the British Empire and a related fear of the foreign. This thesis proposes that the subsequent occlusion of this version of events is due in great part to the consistent and ongoing privileging of negative accounts of the period by the emerging young white male English playwrights of the era, over the more positive commentary provided by their subaltern and female counterparts who were empowered under Lewenstein's aegis.

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## Introduction

When in 1955 the theatre impresario Oscar Lewenstein, the aristocrat Lord Harewood and the poet Ronald Duncan founded the English Stage Company, taking over the lease of the Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square the following year, they enabled the British theatre directors George Devine and Tony Richardson to realise their dream of an experimental art theatre in London (Storey, 2012: 374). It is unlikely that any of these men anticipated the proliferation of scholarship that has subsequently emerged regarding their project. In shaping and nurturing the English Stage Company, Devine's wish, if not his enshrined policy, was that it would become a vital modern theatre of experiment, producing hard-hitting, uncompromising writers whose works were stimulating, provocative and exciting (Browne, 1975: 12, Devine H., 2006: 3). In this respect, the theatre has more than surpassed Devine's aim, as is evidenced by the remarkable number of ground-breaking writers and plays that the institution has championed since its foundation. The impressive list of playwrights associated with the Royal Court Theatre now includes, but is by no means limited to: John Osborne, Shelagh Delaney, Edward Bond, Ann Jellicoe, David Storey, Arnold Wesker, Caryl Churchill, Howard Brenton, Sarah Kane, Jez Butterworth, Mark Ravenhill, Simon Stephens and Debbie Tucker Green. The theatre has produced and premiered a list of plays which are now modern classics such as: *Look Back in Anger* (1956), *Saved* (1965), *The Rocky Horror Show* (1973), *Top Girls* (1982), *Blasted* (1995) and *Jerusalem* (2009).

As both an Irish person and a female playwright, when launching my research journey into the history of the Court, my attention was drawn to the aspects of the institution's history that specifically pertained to the programming of work by these two demographics. Having spoken informally to a number of people who were familiar with

the Court's narrative, I began to garner an impression that the Court had elevated the female voice significantly in the 1980s under the artistic directorship of Max Stafford-Clark. I further ascertained that the Sloane Square theatre championed Irish work in the 1990s, particularly during Stephen Daldry's leadership and at a time when even the Abbey, Ireland's national theatre, had failed to identify and promote talents like Marina Carr and Martin McDonagh. It appeared an impressive legacy and I was keen to trace the history of this association with the advancement of plays by Irish playwrights, and works written by women. I decided to investigate further in an attempt to understand the reasons behind this apparent eagerness to foster talent from marginalised groups.

Relatedly, I was also seeking to discover for which other subaltern groups the Court may have pioneered the provision of a platform. My subsequent reading of histories of the institution bolstered my initial impression of the Court in the 1980s and 1990s as a centre for the advancement of both female and Irish playwriting, respectively. The same research began to throw into relief some questions surrounding omissions in the broad understanding of the 1970s at the Court, however, particularly in regards to the achievements of the artistic directorship of Lewenstein.

Key texts and studies regarding the early 1970s at the Court, almost uniquely those published after 1981, tend to depict the early 1970s at the Court as a tense time of unease and in-fighting when the institution failed to recognise significant trends in performance, and for this reason lost a burgeoning generation of talented emerging playwrights to other theatres. My reading of contemporary and slightly later studies, archival research and interviews with key figures from the era, began to suggest there was perplexing misinformation and omissions regarding the accepted wisdom on this era at the Court. These oversights in turn prompted me to ponder if there was an alternative, perhaps more complex and nuanced, narrative of the era that had not been properly explored or had been occluded in some way.

The early 1970s at the Court were fraught and did indeed see inter-managerial clashes, as minutes of the meetings often attest. For example, the Artistic Committee Meeting of 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 1973, records ‘an unpleasant scene’ between the Court’s Artistic Director Lewenstein and the former co-Artistic Director and a serving Associate Director Lindsay Anderson, at a party given for Court playwright Ann Jellicoe and the Court’s writers.<sup>1</sup> The minutes record that, thereafter, Lewenstein had asked himself ‘whether he could continue to work with Mr. Anderson’ (ibid). In fact, in his autobiography, Lewenstein says the ‘unpleasant scene’ comprised of Anderson hitting him and that he had to be rescued by the playwright Mustapha Matura (Lewenstein, 1994: 170). Therefore, there was undeniable friction at the Court during these years.

The early 1970s, however, was far from a time when the theatre was ‘not on the right boat’ as described by the playwright David Edgar in 2006 (Devine, H. 2006: 100). In fact, the Court’s programme shows that the institution during this era was progressive and moving in step with contemporaneous international theatre trends in its promotion of female and non-British playwrights, Irish work and also that of other subaltern immigrant groups, including non-white writers. It became my conviction that scholarship had not investigated this era with the attention and rigour it merits. The plaudits allocated to later directorships for progressions in supporting female and subaltern theatre are deserved and this thesis is not designed to detract from the advancements of the 1980s and 1990s. I wanted to discern why there was a similar lack of eagerness in scholarship and histories on the Court to give due attention to what were distinct breakthroughs at the institution in the 1970s, and for that matter, the reasons why there has been poor academic appetite for a more thorough investigation of this era.

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Artistic Committee Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup> 1973, the English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/1/6/1).

## Literature Review

My wider reading began with the most recent account of the Court from its inception to the present day, Ruth Little and Emily McLaughlin's *The Royal Court Theatre Inside Out* (Oberon, 2007). This publication is an all-encompassing study illustrated with photographs, documents and even rehearsal notes from productions in Sloane Square 1956-2006. It is written, compiled and collated by Little, a former Literary Manager, and McLaughlin, a former Artistic Associate at the Court; the study focuses on key productions and chronologically divides the history of the Court into the regimes of the various Artistic Directors, 1956-2007. This book includes interviews with actors, writers, directors and others associated with the Court down the decades. With my particular interest in female and Irish playwrights, I was first struck by the thin consideration allocated to female representation at the Court, particularly as the book had been compiled by two women. The tome is over 450 pages in length, yet the study devotes only one and a quarter pages to 'Women Playwrights' at the Sloane Square theatre, in a section which appears within the Stafford-Clark chapter. Here, Little and McLaughlin correctly state that in the 1959-80 period only 8% of programmed playwrights were female; however, notable by its omission is the authors' failure to bring attention to the fact that the majority of these female playwrights were programmed during Lewenstein's relatively short tenure as Artistic Director. I thought it remarkable that the authors do not properly consider this significant advancement by Lewenstein, particularly as his progressions in this arena were actioned during a decade more residually patriarchal than that in which Stafford-Clark operated. The fact that Anne Jellicoe and Caryl Churchill were also installed as Literary Manager and Resident Dramatist respectively during Lewenstein's tenure is recorded elsewhere in Little and McLaughlin's book, but in passing and in the introduction to the Lewenstein chapter where staff changes are listed. There is no emphasis on their gender, no interrogation of what this elevation of the female presence meant for the Court or any exploration of Lewenstein's interest in promoting female voices at the Court. The authors reserve this praise almost entirely for Stafford-Clark's 1980s artistic directorship. This failure to give

due consideration to Lewenstein's introduction to the Court of Churchill is all the more remarkable considering she was to become such a significant British playwright and is, arguably, Britain's most important living playwright. Churchill's close working relationship with Stafford-Clark is highlighted elsewhere in the book.

In their introduction to Lewenstein's era at the Court, Little and McLaughlin describe the Lewenstein years as 'stormy', but do not elucidate on how or to what extent (Little and McLaughlin, 2007:155). Nor do they give any example or reasoning for this description. They also state that Lewenstein was chosen for his 'essentially conservative management practices' which rendered him a 'credible candidate' (ibid). This is a rather uninspiring description of the man, specifically when considering what Lewenstein subsequently achieved at the Court in terms of advancing the female and subaltern voice on the Court's programme. He is instead allocated the faint praise of having programmed 'effectively' (ibid), with emphasis put on his promotion of work by Osborne, Bond, Storey and Hampton, all of whom were established Court writers by the time Lewenstein took the reins. This assessment of his programming strikes an ambivalent, and somewhat unenthusiastic, note. The presence of these playwrights on the bill is hardly Lewenstein's most noteworthy action during his directorship. When regarding the Lewenstein narrative, the fact that Little and McLaughlin choose to highlight the Court's relationship with work by these emerging young male English playwrights during Lewenstein's tenure, occludes his more notable achievements. To an extent, their presentation of the Lewenstein narrative also implies that his artistic directorship was a continuation of the previous triumvirate era.<sup>2</sup> They suggest that the key feature of the Lewenstein period is also a resistance to the 'political' work by emerging white male English playwrights of the early 1970s.

Little and McLaughlin additionally cite the issues some Court figures had with Lewenstein's lack of creative background, pointing out that he was 'an administrator not an

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<sup>2</sup> The 'triumvirate' is a term most used to describe the co-artistic directorship (1969-1972) formed of Bill Gaskill, Lindsay Anderson and Anthony Page.

artist' (Little and McLaughlin, 2007:155). The overall impression created in this introduction to Lewenstein's tenure, if not quite negative, casts his leadership as less-than-impressive. Little and McLaughlin do acknowledge that Lewenstein 'capitalised on what Hanif Kureishi referred to as the "psychological loosening of empire"', although the manner in which he did so, or why, is not explored (Little and McLaughlin, 2007: 156). Little and McLaughlin do also acknowledge a more positive, if somewhat ambivalent, commentary by Harriet Devine, wherein she states that, although Lewenstein was not well liked, his programming was remarkable (Little and McLaughlin, 2007:155). The important and intriguing correlation between Lewenstein's tenure and the end of empire is not further explored, however. It appeared to me that Lewenstein's embrace of a multi-cultural or a 'loosening of empire' programme was the most significant aspect of his artistic directorship of the Court. I began to consider if there was a specific association between the inattention to the Lewenstein years and his focus on writers who did not hail from the white middle-class English male demographic.

The years preceding Lewenstein's tenure comprised a triumvirate management (1969-1972). This period is introduced by Little and McLaughlin with emphasis on an inter-generational schism between management and emerging 1970s playwrights. The friction is blamed on the Court's alleged preference during this period for the established 1960s writers such as Edward Bond, David Storey and Arnold Wesker, over the emerging English writers of the era, including Edgar, David Hare, Snoo Wilson, Howard Barker and Howard Brenton:

Hare, Brenton and Snoo Wilson led a group of playwrights, including Howard Barker, David Edgar and Trevor Griffiths, whose work was largely excluded from the main stage space at the Court due to [Lindsay] Anderson's hostility and the prolific output of the preceding generation. (Little & McLaughlin, 2007: 121)

Little and McLaughlin reiterate and elaborate this point, suggesting that a lack of support for new work had resulted in the best new writing relocating to the National Theatre:

The National Theatre was providing a home for writers whose work might once have premiered at the Court. The theatre had lost its monopoly on the glowing new plays

of its time. (Little & McLaughlin, 2007: 122)

I was struck by the fact that, when contrasted with programme evidence, this assessment of the triumvirate period appears misleading. The Court did not exclude work by emerging writers from the main stage at this time. During these years, the Sloane Square theatre was hosting new work, often by the aforementioned emergent white male English playwrights. As with Lewenstein's achievements, it is baffling why this fact has not been granted due attention and why claims to the contrary have not been properly interrogated in scholarship. This misrepresentation of both the triumvirate era and more particularly the Lewenstein period suggest both artistic directorships were worthy of further scrutiny.

Reading more expansively on both the triumvirate and Lewenstein eras, it became clear that Little and McLaughlin's perception of the early 1970s at the Court is in line with the 'humanist' versus 'political' writers version of Court history that has been frequently offered by the emerging young playwrights of the era and found in all histories of the Court since 1981. Most notably, it became evident that this account of the Lewenstein years does not tally with his record of programming plays which investigated or highlighted political issues including apartheid, feminism and postcolonialism. It was clear that there was a disconnect between the accepted wisdom on this era at the Court and documentary evidence. It was further evident that the triumvirate and Lewenstein years were two separate and distinct periods of artistic directorship which have been conflated to a great degree in the dominant narrative. This obfuscation overwhelmingly stemmed from specious commentary provided by the emergent white male English playwrights of the era whose particular subjective view of events appears to have been accepted with little question or interrogation in scholarship and accorded a disproportionate value. As invested parties, it is possible to characterise the opinions of the emergent white male English playwrights as biased, and it is all the more surprising that their opinions have not been treated more skeptically. Although there are a number of favorable assessments of Lewenstein and his time as Artistic Director at the Court, including the positive views of Matura and Kureishi,

these accounts have not been accorded the interest that has been bestowed upon that of the opinions of the white male English commentators. It was for this reason that I began to wonder to what extent the imbalance of scholarship pertaining to the Court in the 1970s was also due to an over-privileging of the accounts of this group of emergent white male English playwrights. This scenario raised a question of elitism and, moreover, a research gap as it discerns a disconnect between the partial observations of specific playwrights and the empirical evidence of what was actually programmed.

I was concerned that there was a parallel discourse that had been occluded, and that to some extent, facts had been misrepresented. More importantly, I wished to explore why this occlusion may have occurred and what an investigation could reveal about the culture at the Court during this time. Furthermore, I was interested in what such an exploration would evince, identify and explain about the present-day ecology of the Sloane Square theatre.

Prior to the publication of Little and McLaughlin's study, it was Richard Findlater's 1981 publication *At the Royal Court: 25 years of the English Stage Company* (Amber Lane Press, 1981) which had provided the most comprehensive study of the theatre. Findlater declares that his aim in his commemorative study is to enlarge and update Terry Browne's 1975 history of the institution. The result is an appealing coffee table book comprising illustrations, articles, box office and income figures for Court shows from 1956 to 1981. Findlater's book was compiled on the invitation of the Court to mark the institution's twenty-fifth, or silver, anniversary. The Sloane Square institution is described in the preface by Findlater as, 'the most persistently seminal, significantly productive and stubbornly controversial' British theatre (Findlater, 1981: 7).<sup>3</sup> This view largely sets the tone for the book. Its value as a study of the Court is compromised by the fact that, to some extent, it fulfils a marketing role for the theatre in an anniversary year. Accordingly, it is lauding of

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<sup>3</sup> The term 'Sloane Square institution' is employed throughout this study as a synonym for the Royal Court Theatre. It refers directly to the address of the theatre, on London's Sloane Square. The term is used here for stylistic purposes, to avoid repetition, and also in recognition of the Court's status as an institution within the ecology of contemporary theatre in Britain.



the Court's accomplishments and not greatly critical or interrogative as a study.

In Findlater, key Court figures provide their perspective on their respective period of association with the Court. Hare's section, which is largely concerned with the triumvirate period and on into the 1970s and Lewenstein's tenure, is titled 'Time of Unease' and it is here that Hare first complains publically of the tense atmosphere which he alleges he battled in seeking support for work he championed:

I believe that the Court in the early seventies was primarily an aesthetic theatre, not a political one. And the reason why it then lost the loyalty of so many writers in the following years was because it finally refused to move into the field of English politics although it was presenting excellent political work about the Third World. A direct confrontation finally occurred between those who wanted the Court to be a socialist theatre and those who wanted it be a humanist theatre and, no question, the humanists won. It is for that reason that many of the best plays of the seventies were not performed at the Court, because there was in the older generation, a squeamishness about moving into a directly political field. I believe this was a tragedy for the Court and it is taking time to recover. (Hare in Findlater, 1981: 145)

It is important to provide this quote in full here as it has been republished in part or in entirety in subsequent studies on the Court, including Philips (1999) and Little and McLaughlin (2012). The ubiquity of this quote suggests it has strongly influenced scholarship concerning the first half of the 1970s at the Court, without ever having been properly interrogated. The theory that there was a 'humanist' and 'political' divide at play, an unproven and rather reductive dichotomy, is continued right up to Little and McLaughlin's publication. It is noteworthy that in Findlater, both Athol Fugard and Matura enthuse in their respective sections about Lewenstein's support, his openness, generosity and integrity in relation to their artistic praxis and the theatre of the subaltern, yet it is Hare's particular interpretation of the Lewenstein years that has made the stronger impression and impact in later scholarship.

The 2006 publication on the Court is by Harriet Devine, the daughter of George Devine, who had served as Literary Manager at the Court in the late 1960s. *Looking Back: Playwrights at the Royal Court 1956-2006* (Faber and Faber, 2006) was also brought out to celebrate an anniversary of the Court, the fiftieth in this case. For her publication, Devine conducted thirty interviews with playwrights in that anniversary year. Devine's selection of

playwrights runs from John Arden, who was first produced by the Court in 1957 with his play *The Waters of Babylon* through to Simon Farquhar, whose Court *début*, *Rainbow Kiss*, ran at the Sloane Square theatre in 2006. In terms of the early 1970s, in the introduction to this study Devine states that the emergent playwrights Hare and Edgar were unhappy at the Court during this period. She quotes Edgar on what he perceived as an inter-generational power tussle with an older generation providing that clichéd resistance to a youthful movement:

Generation one is about the cultural consequences of democratisation and the war, so that's Osborne's Jimmy Porter, that's certainly the end of Wesker's *Roots*, that's Bond's *Saved*. The next lot, our lot, are reform versus revolution. (Edgar in Devine, H. 2006: 11)

Later in this publication, Hare criticises the Court for not supporting his generation during this period, a perception which, from 1981 onwards, had been Hare's consistent interpretation of the early 1970s at the Sloane Square theatre:

It was a generational problem... they didn't like me, they didn't like Howard Brenton, they didn't like Snoo, and they didn't like Howard Barker and they didn't like Trevor Griffiths, they didn't like David Edgar. (Hare in Devine, H., 2006: 152-153)

It is a viewpoint likewise amplified by Edgar later in this book:

There was a general sense in which the early 1970s was probably the only period when the Royal Court was not on the right boat... I don't think the Royal Court [had] really caught up with what was going on at that time. (Edgar in Devine, H. 2006: 100)

Devine states that these two playwrights are alone in their recollection of unhappy experiences at the Court. Yet, she does not directly challenge their interpretation of the era.

The older generation at the Court underappreciating and resisting work by the emerging playwrights is by now the standard interpretation on that era. This narrative is still widely repeated elsewhere, largely by the emergent white male playwrights of the era. Similarly, the playwright Howard Brenton is on record as claiming 'there was a generational and professional dust-up between us and them. With them saying you're not going to get your hands on our theatre.'<sup>4</sup> According to Nicholas Wright, Manager of the Theatre Upstairs

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<sup>4</sup> See Roland Rees, *Fringe First Pioneers of Fringe Theatre on Record* (London, Oberon, 1992: 204), Quoted in Megson, 2012:76.

(1969-1974) and later co-Artistic Director (1975-1977):

When I said at a meeting that I had programmed *The Pleasure Principle* by Snoo Wilson, to be directed by David Hare, Lindsay [Anderson] guffawed and then said ‘sorry, but those two names in the same sentence!’ He was equally suspicious of Caryl Churchill, whom he very inaccurately thought of as a middle-class Hampstead dilettante.<sup>5</sup>

Wright further recalls that the Court’s Artistic Director Bill Gaskill expressed an opinion that ‘Howard Brenton should be taken out and buried in a hole in a field’ (ibid).<sup>6</sup>

This portrayal of the early 1970s at the Court as a tense and fractious period rife with inter-generational friction has become the received understanding of the era in publications on the Sloane Square theatre. It is also by now part of an established narrative in which this period at the Court is presented as a time when the institution floundered, failed to grasp the *zeitgeist* or support a rising generation of talented emerging playwrights. This perception of these years holds that the Court subsequently lost this emerging talent of the 1970s to other theatres across the capital and beyond. In her study, Devine does not consider that this narrative might be too neat a proposal, predicated on an erroneous assertion that neither the triumvirate directorship nor Lewenstein supported political playwrights or a younger generation. Devine does, to her credit, include interviews with other playwrights of the era, including Donald Howarth, Matura and Kureishi, all of whom praise this time at the Court, and Lewenstein in particular. Notwithstanding their lauding of the latter, which can also be occasionally found in pre-1981 publications on the Court, it remains that the negative assessment of the era provided by the emergent 1970s white male English playwrights has solidified in the mainstream’s understanding of the Court at that time, and continues to be consistently repeated by key figures such as Edgar and Hare.

Devine’s use of verbatim interviews forms part of a tradition in scholarship on the

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<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Wright unpublished interview with Sue Healy, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Notting Hill, London.

<sup>6</sup> Gaskill served as Artistic Director 1965-1969 and in triumvirate directorship with Page and Anderson 1969-1972.

Court, one that began with Terry Browne's 1975 study and continues through to the most recent publication by Little and McLaughlin. The constant presence of this approach in Court studies has prevented a thorough investigation of the early 1970s at the theatre. The lack of interrogation of statements made by interviewees or any great evidence that they have been checked against documentary proof seems to have led to the firming and promulgation of certain questionable perceptions of the 1970s at the institution, without consideration of their merit or veracity. By refraining from an exploration of what is being articulated, there is risk of overlooking contradictions and underestimating the potential scope of the Court's history with all its complications and nuances. The fact that this verbatim reportage approach has been over-used in Court scholarship further indicates a research gap, a call for a study that employs other evidence to measure against what is stated in interview. This thesis addresses a need for research on the Court to ensure that methodology is employed in a judicious manner, and to look beyond interview statements and consider alternative reasons why interviewees may hold particular views. More broadly, this investigation explores the problems and issues which emerge when scholars overly rely on the opinions of a small group of figures with a vested interest in their subject.

Another key example of subjective verbatim reportage that has directly fed scholarship on the Court for decades is the 1990 Louisiana State University Press publication, *The English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre: Production Practices and Legacies, 1956-81*. This volume comprises a collection of panel interviews given at a Royal Court Theatre conference at the University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1981. The conference was held to mark the Court's twenty-fifth anniversary. In this respect, the Louisiana Press material is similar and near-contemporaneous to Findlater's 1981 book, which was published some months before the conference took place. The Louisiana Press volume was published nine years after the conference, however, compiled from stenographic notes and video recordings of the 1981 event. The final publication was edited by the conference organisers, Gresdna A. Doty and Billy J. Harbin. This book is of

particular interest because of the unguarded nature of the comments made by the invited panelists, at a remove from the Sloane Square theatre and their more familiar environs. Panelists included Christopher Hampton, Jocelyn Herbert, Howarth, Churchill, Jellicoe, Hare, Wilson, Gaskill, Stafford-Clark, Wright, Martin Esslin and Stuart Burge. It is important to note that Lewenstein had to cancel his participation due to ill-health, so his reactions to the opinions and interpretations of others are not recorded, nor was he on hand to offer his understanding of events, which may have run contrary to the perceptions of the emergent English playwrights of the era.

In Doty and Harbin, the reprinted interviews are taken from Q&A sessions featuring a panel and audience. There is scant interpretation by the editors, although there are occasional footnotes added for exposition or to correct mis-statements or mis-information provided by the panelists. A short introduction gives an accurate factual overview of the history of the Court, and this introduction is particularly notable as, unusually for Court scholarship, it is one in which Lewenstein is correctly referred to as a ‘co-founder’ of the English Stage Company, (Doty, Harbin, 1990: 12). Doty and Harbin also highlight in this section Lewenstein’s support of works that explored ‘Irish, American, Australian and Third World issues’ (Doty, Harbin, 1990; 13). They further quote Lewenstein, from a separate interview:

I felt that in the period preceding me the plays of the Court had become less plays on public issues than had been the situation under Devine; the plays seemed to have narrowed in focus. (Lewenstein in Doty, Harbin, 1990: 13)

Notwithstanding their research and recognition of Lewenstein’s importance at the Court, the balance of the Louisiana Press volume reports verbatim from the six panel sessions in which the participants explore and discuss the Court’s artistic philosophy, operating policies, government subsidies and production practices at the Court, from their perspectives. Their reflections on the 1970s are of interest to this study because they reveal that in 1981 there was a shift in how the emerging 1970s playwrights were interpreting the 1970s at the Court. With the absence of Lewenstein at this conference, there was a near consensus by the panel in describing the era in a negative light. The complaints regarding the era included

assertions that the emergent 1970s playwrights were unsupported by the Court and that the theatre's resident dramatist was not provided with a platform for their own work:

That was during a period of time when it was somehow incorporated into the unwritten constitution that whatever else you might do with your resident dramatist, doing his plays was not one of them. (Hare in Doty, Harbin, [1981] 1990: 150)

Here, Hare refers to the early 1970s and his own time as Resident Dramatist at the Court. It is an era when he alleges he received little or no championing from the Court for his plays.

He had made a similar assertion three months earlier in the Findlater book. Doty and Harbin do, in fact, contradict and correct Hare's erroneous statement in their footnotes:

The plays of several resident dramatists were, in fact, produced by the Royal Court including Hampton's *Total Eclipse* (1968), Whitehead's *Alpha Beta* (1972) and Brenton's *Magnificence* (1973). (Doty, Harbin, [1981] 1990: 150)

It is important to note that in 1971, the Court also staged Hare's *Slag* (1970) and the Irish playwright Wilson John Haire, who served as Resident Dramatist at the Court in the early 1970s, had his work staged at the Court during the Lewenstein era.

In addition to Hare's *Slag*, Brenton's *Magnificence* and Wilson's *The Pleasure Principle*, which are considered in more depth in Chapter One, other work by emergent 1970s playwrights which were staged at the Court in the early 1970s include Edgar's *State of Emergency* (1972), which showed in the Theatre Upstairs, *Hitler Dances* (1972) and a collaborative piece Edgar penned with Brenton, *A Fart for Europe* (1973), also staged in the upstairs space. Two multi-authored plays, *Lay-By* (1970) and *England's Ireland* (1970), for which the Court was an albeit reluctant host, were performed in the studio space (Findlater, 1981: 154, 2). These collaborations involved writers Brenton, Hare, Wilson, Edgar, Howard Barker, Brian Clarke, Francis Fuchs, Tony Bicat and Trevor Griffiths. It should be noted that *Slag* was first produced by the Hampstead Theatre the previous year. It is likely therefore, that Hare felt somewhat aggrieved that the Court's interest was piqued only after the play's success elsewhere.

At the conference, Hare further elaborates on comments he had earlier made to Findlater regarding the Court resisting new ideas in the 1970s: 'I couldn't get any of the plays on that I felt passionate about, it became increasingly difficult' (Hare in Doty, Harbin,

[1981]1990: 150). Wright and Hampton sitting on the same Baton Rouge panel concur that there was a resistance to their work and that of other emergent writers of the 1970s at the Court. They agree with Hare's suggestion that this was because their work was overtly political and add that the Court forfeited a generation of talent due to this anachronistic stance. As Wright articulates it, 'A lot of people who, I think, should have settled in the Royal Court, and who would have been very good for it, just didn't' (Doty, Harbin, 1990: 104). Hampton, the Court's resident dramatist 1968-1970, adds ballast to this viewpoint:

There was a time at the beginning of the seventies when the writers that ought to have been recruited were somehow bungled and not quite recruited, or half recruited and they formed a sort of opposition within the theatre, which had repercussions for some years. (Doty, Harbin, 1990: 104)

It is worth noting at this point Hampton's use of the terms 'recruit' and 'bungled' in reference to attracting writers to the Court, as if an ineffective military operation was at work, attempting to detain the unwilling. Their perception of the era is mildly challenged by the two female panelists, Jellicoe and Churchill, and the moderator Joel Schechter, Associate Literary Manager of Yale Repertory Theatre and the editor of *Theatre*:

Mr. Hare: I tried to get Howard Brenton's work done at the Court for a long time.  
Mr. Schechter: He did have productions done at the Royal Court, didn't he?  
Mr. Hampton: They were always sort of grudging about it.  
Ms. Jellicoe: It doesn't matter whether it's grudging, as long as it gets put on. (Doty, Harbin, 1990: 150)

This point is not further dwelt upon in any detail and the discussion changes course when Hare interjects 'to get back to your question, is there such a thing as a Royal Court writer?' (Doty, Harbin, 1990: 151). As the conference took place shortly after the publication of Findlater's book, Hare was specifically asked about his comments in Findlater regarding the resistance of the older management; the quote from Findlater's book had already made its impact. Wright's commentary also chimes with Hare's point of view:

1969 was the year when a quite coherent generation of playwrights began appearing, including David Hare, Howard Brenton and Snoo Wilson, and they were being staunchly resisted by the establishment of the Royal Court. (Wright in Doty, Harbin, 1990: 100)

Wright's support of Hare on this point further demonstrates how Hare's fellow emergent white male playwrights were by now echoing his perception of events.

When asked what characterised the absent Lewenstein's regime, Gaskill replies 'the most impressive thing about Oscar's period was the three South African plays' (Doty, Harbin, 1990: 60). Nothing further is proffered. Again, I was struck by the lack of interest or willingness to emphasise Lewenstein's work regarding Irish and female playwrights. More notable still is a comment later made regarding the treatment of women at the Court: Jellicoe addresses the misogyny she encountered as a female in the 1960s. She ruefully regrets that she had not previously been more honest about the sexism she had had to face when interviewed by Wardle for his Devine biography (Doty, Harbin 1990: 158). In contrast, and in response to Jellicoe's recollections of the 1960s at the Court, Churchill claims she did not experience sexism when she was later introduced at the Court by Lewenstein in the 1970s (ibid). The issue of misogyny is not investigated any further. There is no reference to Lewenstein's elevation of the female presence during his tenure.

It is useful to compare the Baton Rouge commentary and other post-1981 interpretations of the early 1970s at the Court with that of the first ever published narrative concerning the Court, Terry Browne's *Playwrights' Theatre* (Pitman, 1975). This book is a slim paperback which, rather like the later one by Findlater, gives emphasis to the positive achievements of the Court from its inception to the time of publication (1956-1975). Browne's book shores up how the Court had up to that date played a prominent role in the mainstream of social developments in terms of confronting attitudes towards sexuality and race, and artistic and political developments including challenging censorship. *Playwrights' Theatre* draws on company records and interviews with Court figures and has significant focus on the institution's finances, payment culture and the subsidies received.

The tone of this publication is of particular note because it emphasises the excitement of a new decade at the Court and makes reference to the emerging common and unifying themes in theatre-making including an anarchic energy, and hope in the face of catastrophe. There is evaluation of the extent to which the new dramatists were building on the achievements of Court writers of the earlier decades. It is useful to note that such interpretations also appear in John Russell Taylor's 1971 commentary on the wider



theatrical scene of the era, *The Second Wave* (Browne, 1975: 101, Russell Taylor, 1971: 226-227). Both these publications suggest a continuation rather than a divide or rejection of an earlier era. Browne's book highlights contributions from both pre-1968 and post-1968 playwrights. The Court is further praised by Browne for attracting and supporting new, young talent such as Hare and Brenton. Indeed, the only criticism highlighted at this time is that the Court, in its eagerness to support the new writers, is too ready to provide star actors for new work.<sup>7</sup> In the opinion of some, celebrity actors tilted the theatre towards the commercial (Browne, 1975: 101, Russell Taylor, 1971: 226-227).

Weighing this near-contemporary commentary against later statements by the emerging white male English playwrights of the era, there appears to have been a marked shift in the perception of the triumvirate and Lewenstein eras over the years, from contemporaneous publications which saw the early 1970s at the Court as exciting and innovative and supportive of the new writers, to the understanding of more recent studies which tend to blur the time-boundaries between the two directorships and portray the 1969-1975 era as inconsequential, misguided and fraught. This negative interpretation of the era appears to have grown to a great extent out of retrospective commentary by the young playwrights at the Court, including Hare, Wilson and Edgar. Unlike the later works, there is no mention in Browne's study of tensions between the various camps and generations at the Court throughout late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>8</sup> Browne is an outsider looking in, and did not have the personal experience that the authors of later books on the Court often had. Nonetheless, Browne accepts much at face value and, similarly to later Court chroniclers, he does not interrogate statements to a great degree, for example he reiterates that Gaskill's recruitment of Anderson and Page as co-directors during his sabbatical was because Gaskill wished to bring 'fresh ideas' to the Court, despite the two new co-Artistic Directors being associated with the Court longer than he. Also notable are Browne's comments on Hare's

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<sup>7</sup> This latter point was also a common criticism of the Court in the late 1990s, during the height of its 'in-ye-face' years.

<sup>8</sup> Browne does detail the public tussle between the Court and the critic Hilary Spurling which ensued when Gaskill refused her free tickets in 1969.

arrival at the Court and his understanding of Hare's early relationship with the Sloane

Square theatre which runs contrary to the grain of Hare's own later version of this history:

David Hare had already spent a time reading plays at the Court when he became Resident Dramatist in 1970-71 and had become a playwright partly in reaction to that experience. E.A. Whitehead had already had *The Foursome* produced at the Theatre Upstairs when he became Resident Dramatist in 1971. He [Hare] used his residence there to buy time to think and to work. He hardly ever appeared at the Court, but there were no complaints and he turned in a major script. (Browne, 1975: 100)

Browne's commentary contrasts with many of Hare's own later claims, most notably that there were 'no complaints' from Hare, and that he 'turned in' a major script whilst Resident Dramatist (*Slag* (1970)).

Browne's book enthuses on the founding of the Theatre Upstairs which he refers to as a 'continuing success' and at no time considers that the Court is not engaging with new movements in theatre (Browne, 1975: 85). In this light, Browne hails the 1970 *Come Together Festival* of alternative theatre at the Court as having been 'exciting and novel' and reports that the event was programmed by Gaskill to show the 'best of the regional festivals' work', thus providing the movement with 'the recognition it deserves' and a hope that there might be 'a cross-fertilisation' between the different kinds of work shown' (Browne, 1975: 93). Browne reasons, with some justification, that the lack of transfers from the Theatre Upstairs to the Theatre Downstairs was due to the inflexibility of the seating, which would mean extensive re-writing and re-directing. Notably, the publication cites the Theatre Upstairs' transfer of *The Rocky Horror Show* (1973) as its most interesting and most successful transfer, and outlines how important the revenue from this show was for the continuance of the Theatre Upstairs (Browne, 1975: 95).

Again, in contrast to later works, in his 1975 publication Browne lauds the 'flood of good new plays' that were staged at the Court 1971-1974 – noting particularly that these plays come from both generations at the Court (Browne, 1975: 101). Although Browne's statements in this regard can only be taken as the author's subjective opinion, they are of note here because it is the first study on the Court and Browne's understanding of events contradicts so markedly the later opinions expressed by the emerging playwrights of the era.

Significantly for this thesis Browne adds:

Oscar Lewenstein was the natural choice to become Artistic Director – he had been a founder of the Company, had worked closely with it ever since and had been an influential and courageous producer in his own right. (Browne, 1975: 97)

This recognition that Lewenstein was a co-founder of the company and had remained close to the theatre since its inception has also very largely ignored in subsequent studies of the institution. Browne does not greatly highlight Lewenstein's introduction of subaltern playwrights during his tenure or define what was his attitude to artistic praxis and how it may have differed from that of his predecessors. Nonetheless, this contemporary or near-contemporary commentary which draws on primary source evidence and contemporaneous interviews is of significance in this research because, unlike many subsequent publications, it presents the Court as being supportive of the emergent dramatists of the era:

Each Resident Dramatist has had at least one play produced while he was at the Court. Besides Hampton's plays, the Court produced Hare's *Slag* in March 1971; Whitehead's *Alpha Beta* in January 1972 (*Alpha Beta* then transferred to the Apollo Theatre and was produced in New York in 1973); and Howard Brenton's *Magnificence* in 1973. (Browne, 1975: 100)

Browne additionally presents an interview with Brenton in which the playwright further praises the Court for its support during this period. Brenton's plays had created a great deal of trouble and outrage at other theatres: *Christie in Love* (1969) had been attacked and nearly prosecuted for obscenity in Brighton and his version of *Measure for Measure* (1972) had had similar problems in Exeter, which occurred while Brenton was resident dramatist at the Court:

It shows some courage in what is said to be an orthodox and middle aged and safe theatre to appoint me first [as Resident Dramatist], and to put my play on. And in order to fit *Magnificence*, and another new play, *The Removalists*, by the young Australian playwright David Williamson, into the schedule it as necessary to set back the production of Storey's *Cromwell* seven weeks – and *Cromwell* had been waiting about eighteen months for a production as it was. (Brenton in Browne, 1975: 101)

Although grateful for championing his work, it is certainly of note that, by the time of this interview in 1974, Brenton views the Royal Court as 'orthodox', 'middle aged' and 'safe'. Nonetheless, Brenton does credit the Sloane Square institution with being supportive, which is in marked contrast to commentary from emergent English playwrights in later studies.

Browne appears somewhat preoccupied with discourses criticizing the Court for transferring too many plays to the West End, and accusations that the Court was too orientated towards commercial success. Taking a supportive stance, Browne dismisses these claims, stating that the Court, ‘*should* transfer plays; they should flood the West End with plays that they believe in’ (Browne, 1975: 101). Significantly for this thesis, Browne adds that the Court must continue to attract new talent in the way it attracted Hare et al. Browne does not ever suggest that this attempt to attract new voices was not happening at the Court.

In 1981, the same year the Findlater book was published and the year that the Court conference took place in Baton Rouge, a collection was published of sixteen interviews with key British theatre figures which had originally appeared in *Theatre Quarterly*. These interviews had been conducted throughout the 1970s, and comprised various journalists and critics in conversation with key playwrights and directors. Collated and edited by Simon Trussler, the collection is titled *New Theatre Voices of the Seventies* (Methuen, 1981). Trussler’s publication regards the wide terrain of British theatre in that decade, not merely the Sloane Square theatre. Trussler’s study also focuses strongly on 1968, the year of radicalisation, and its impact on contemporary playwrights and playwriting:

For many theatre people of the time, political virginity was soon lost amidst a welter of permissive (and reactionary) ideals, and the years immediately following 1968 tend now to be recollected with a mixture of pride at real achievement and awareness of lost innocence. (Trussler, 1981: 85)

The interviews are lively, opinionated and often political in their consideration. Notably again, there is scant negative appraisal of the Court in these interviews carried out throughout the 1970s. Indeed, when referenced, the Sloane Square institution is most often lionised by the interviewees who include: Gaskill, Bond, Brenton, McGrath, Hare, Griffiths, Edgar, Wilson and Barker. Again, Hare, who was to later be so critical of how the Court had treated him and his fellow emergent writers during the early 1970s, makes no reference to this unease in his extensive 1975 interview, or to any stylistic or generational or artistic schism or indeed any lack of support from the Court. He speaks about his stint as Literary Manager at the Sloane Square theatre and specifically the conception of the collaborative

project *Lay By* (1971) (Trussler, 1981: 116). Wilson refers only to the care the Court took in the design of recreating the Theatre Downstairs as a set in the Theatre Upstairs, for his play *The Pleasure Principle* (1974), which was directed by Hare (Trussler, 1981: 177). In Brenton's 1974 interview, he states, 'Although I'm not in the tradition of the Court – I'm not what you would call a humanist writer, not of the mainstream of the Court at all – they've always been good to me' (Trussler, 1981: 88). This comment implies that Brenton believed there was a division between his 'political' approach and his perception of a 'humanist' tradition at the Court. Nevertheless, he praises their support (Trussler, 1981: 88). Hare, Wilson and Brenton's reluctance in 1975 to speak negatively of the Court can be understood in light of their need to maintain a good relationship with a theatre which was providing a platform for their work; however, such an interpretation would also have to allow for the fact that their work was being supported at that time by the Court.

Philip Roberts' 1999 publication, *The Royal Court Theatre and the Modern Stage* is, refreshingly for the canon of Court studies, not entirely reliant on verbatim interviews. This volume is an updating of an earlier publication by the same author. Roberts draws on primary evidence including minutes of meetings and also considers in detail subsidies the Court received from the Arts Council of Great Britain over the years. The author still chooses to give a leading platform to the opinions and perceptions of the emergent white male English playwrights of the early 1970s, and particularly their suggestion that there was a schism along the lines of artistic praxis during the early 1970s. Roberts' decision to title Chapter Five of his book 'A Humanist Theatre' demonstrates that he is employing the optic of the emerging 1970s playwrights, as they were vocal in their criticism of the Court being too attached to what they perceived as a 'humanist' tendency in their programming in the early 1970s, which the emergent writers felt excluded them from the stage. Chapter Five is the section of the book that deals specifically with the 1969-1975 period. The chapter title, 'A Humanist Theatre', also demonstrates that the narrative of a 'humanist' versus 'political' wrangle for control of the Court was solidifying in the accepted account of Court history. Indeed, the chapter title makes direct use of the aforementioned quote from Hare from his

1981 interview with Findlater, and that specific quote is also reprinted in this publication, subheading Chapter Five. The use of Hare's words to preface this chapter signals a specific privileging of the playwright's interpretation of events, and this is also indicative of the currency Hare's opinion held by the time of publication (1999). In this way, Hare's commentary helps to cement the emergent male English playwrights' version of events as the dominant one in the Court history:

It was a time when the Court resisted any new ideas. Instinctively, the older generation didn't like the younger generation's style of work. That was basically the true basis of the problem. (Hare in Roberts, 1999: 100)

In this quote, Hare once more references alleged intergenerational tussles and differing opinions on artistic approach during this era. In fact, all the main considerations of Chapter Five of Roberts' book are predicated on similar opinions from the emergent white male English dramatists of the period. For example, Roberts further repeats that other unfounded claim by Hare, which also appeared in the Findlater 1981 book on the Court, that 'all resident dramatists in this period had their plays rejected; it became a feature of the job' (Roberts, 1999: 131). Likewise, Roberts repeats Wright's assertion that the work of the emergent writers was being staunchly resisted by the 'establishment' at the Court (Roberts, 1999: 131). Roberts does suggest that the 'stormy' reputation that the era now has, was more evident during the triumvirate years than during Lewenstein's tenure, and that these tensions were most prominent at management meetings. Roberts employs meeting minutes to highlight examples of heated discussion during the very early 1970s.

Roberts advances this argument to suggest that the appointment of Lewenstein was a demonstration that the 'humanists' had won control of the Court in the early 1970s (Roberts, 1999: 142). This perception is again in line with that of the emerging white male playwrights, that their self-declared political approach was unappreciated and unsupported by the Court, an institution which they believe favoured the 'humanist' approach of their predecessors. For balance, Roberts does briefly provide what he describes as Wright's 'subtle analysis' of Lewenstein at the Court, where Wright intriguingly cites both

‘snobbery’ and ‘anti-Semitism’ as reasons for Lewenstein’s lack of popularity at the institution. Roberts suggests that Lewenstein was largely seen as an ‘usurper’, despite being associated with the Court from its very beginning (Roberts, 1999: 144). He also cites Lewenstein’s introduction of Churchill to the Court and cites the South African season as a highpoint of Lewenstein’s tenure. Nonetheless, these mentions are slight and almost in passing and overall Roberts’ book falls substantially short of stressing the importance and significance of Lewenstein’s promotion of subaltern writers, which is a concerning neglect.

Overall, scholarship regarding the Court in the 1968-1975 period tends to focus more fixedly on the end of censorship and thereafter on the apparent tensions which allegedly caused an exodus of young talent from the Court. The evident progressions of the era are not accorded due consideration. In Findlater’s 1981 study, which was largely a marketing or commemorative volume as previously highlighted, this negative summation of these years is first articulated by Hare. Subsequent publications have cemented Hare’s interpretation of the era, many quoting him directly. Hare’s fellow English playwrights of the period have amplified and used Hare’s quote in Findlater to underpin their understanding of events. It is clear that since the 1981 publication of Findlater’s book, discourses on the institution do not stray far from this portrayal (Little & McLaughlin, 2007: 122, 155; Findlater, 1981: 116-117, 139; Doty, Harbin, 1990: 166; Hare in Devine, H., 2006: 152-153; Edgar in Devine, H. 2006: 100; Wright, in Doty, Harbin, 1990: 100).

### **The need for a reassessment of the received narrative**

This thesis specifically considers the narrative of the emergent white male English playwrights of the 1970s and asks if it has been privileged over other more positive perceptions of the period offered by non-British, non-white and female writers of the era. This study seeks evidence to support claims by these emergent playwrights that the hostility they experienced at the Court meant they had to approach other venues for support, or form their own theatre companies in order to stage the vital, contemporary theatre they contend the Court would not champion. Additionally, this thesis explores their assertion that a

generation of talented writers were discouraged from applying to the Court, and considers the extent to which the support provided to the emergent 1970s playwrights could genuinely be viewed as insufficient. Illuminating the reasons why the triumvirate management at the Court (1969-1972) may have resisted the new forms of theatre taking root in Britain, this thesis regards the specific dynamics of the relationship between the triumvirate management (Gaskill, Anderson and Page), Lewenstein and the young playwrights.

The received narrative of the Court's history has been revisited and challenged previously. As early as the 1970s, scholarship was beginning to question the impact of Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) and most notably, in 1999, Dan Rebellato published a study which challenges the play's myth, to a certain degree. Rebellato contests that British theatre prior to 1956 was not as repressed as had previously been held. Although Rebellato acknowledges that *Look Back in Anger* was seminal and provided a new approach and an example of what theatre could be, and how it could be staged, and that it introduces to the British stage a gritty realism and political directness, nevertheless, he maps genealogies to demonstrate that British theatre was already progressing towards this point and Osborne's play cannot be solely credited for the revolution (Rebellato, 1999: 1-2).

Whether supporting or challenging the *Look Back in Anger* myth, scholarship on 1956 and the decade that ensued at the Court, is abundant. Despite having outlived Devine and experienced the stewardship of twelve subsequent artistic directors and six decades of association with playwrights of cultural and artistic significance, it is the first ten years of the Court that continues to be the main focus of study for historians, researchers and critical commentators alike (Browne, 1975: 1-71, Findlater, 1981: 27-88; Little & McLaughlin, 2007: 17-85; Rebellato, 1999: 4; Roberts, 1999: 45; Roberts, 1988: 61-62; Russell Taylor, 1963, 1971: 7). The first decade of the Court's genesis has, by now, been addressed so widely and robustly in scholarship due to the initial perception that Osborne's play and those by the other 'angry young men' of his generation, brought about a paradigm shift in theatre. Scholarly interest in these early years at the Court is thus understandable as the key figures associated with the institution during that era came to be viewed as pioneers who



radicalised British theatre (Findlater, 1981: 7; Harwood 1984: 305; Hinchcliffe 1974: 46; Rusinko, 1989: 1; Taylor, 1963: 16). Also and importantly, the institution's first decade is the furthest point in time from the present and it is therefore not unusual that this period has accumulated a greater degree of scholarship.

Comparing scholarly interest in the decades since the 1950s and considering how they have been presented in Court studies, it is remarkable that the intense focus on the first decade of the Court is next rivalled in volume by scholarly study of the 1990s, and then to a lesser extent that of the 1980s. There has been comparatively slight scholarly attention paid to the very late 1960s and early to mid 1970s at the Court.

Supposed commonalities shared by the 1950s and 1990s have been notably exploited in Court marketing. The Court's website employs the artificiality of decade-ism to its advantage and uses this construct to accord its history neatly marketable legends, allowing the institution to self-mythologise and self-eulogise particularly in regard to the 'angry young man' movement of the 1950s and the 'in-yr-face' movement of the 1990s.<sup>9</sup> Osborne's lead character in *Look Back in Anger*, Jimmy Porter, came to be viewed as the model for the 'angry young man', the disaffected male of the post-World War II generation who launched the so-called 'kitchen sink' movement (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 26-28; Roberts, P. 1999: 47-48; Russell Taylor, J. 1971: 7).<sup>10</sup> The novelty of this new type of theatre is reflected in the fact that commentators referred to it at the time as 'new wave' or 'vital theatre' in *Encore*, a theatre magazine founded in 1956 and which ran until the mid-1960s and which was closely associated with the new movement in drama and boasted the subtitle *Voice of Vital Theatre* (Lacey, 1995: 38). Terms such as 'vital', which related to 'life', were often associated with this new 'revivifying' movement and it is of note that this vocabulary also relates neatly to Devine's vision of a 'vital, living, popular' theatre

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<sup>9</sup> See <https://royalcourttheatre.com/about/history/> [accessed on Dec. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017].

<sup>10</sup> Jimmy Porter sits his living room ranting at the audience, and not a kitchen as is commonly believed. That the term 'kitchen sink' emerged as a label for this movement, illustrates the power of the received narrative to create and perpetuate myths.

(Browne, 1975: 12; Rebellato, 1999: 21). Thus, the ‘angry-young-man’ movement came to be seen as one which gave life to British theatre.

Media preoccupation with the ‘revivifying’ aspect of drama at the Court emerges again in the 1990s with in-yer-face theatre.<sup>11</sup> The Court is fond of pairing the 1990s with the 1950s as highpoints in Court history. ‘In-yer-face’ is, arguably, not a movement in a strong united sense but as its emergence during the 1990s at the Court is credited for saving British drama from stagnation, it drew a ‘revivifying’ parallel to the angry-young-man dramas of the 1950s (Sierz, 2000: xi). Even the three-word-echoing of ‘in-yer-face’ and ‘angry-young-man’ suggests a conscious linking of the two eras. There were some similar elements present, most obviously an intention to shock and provoke (Sierz, 2001: 4). The *épater les bourgeois* aspect of work by the ‘angry young men’ and the ‘in-yer-face’ writers suggests a contempt for inherited values. Theatre critics quickly noted a similarity between Ravenhill’s *Shopping and Fucking* (1996) and *Look Back in Anger* (1956) and particularly the respective *cries de coeur* of Ravenhill’s Robbie and Osborne’s Jimmy (Billington, 2007: 358-360). The ‘in-yer-face’ genre is more visceral and unabashed in regards to bodily functions, sex and violence, as is evident in works such as Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* (1995) or Ravenhill’s *Shopping and Fucking* (1996), although these characteristics would encompass a wide range of plays beyond this specific movement. The Court’s website, again keen to focus on the more marketable similarities between the so-called ‘kitchen sink’ genre and ‘in-yer-face’, states that the 1990s at the Court ‘recaptured the fury of the 1950s’ era.<sup>12</sup> This statement is further evidence of the theatre’s ability to create energy around its own myths and also illustrates its dependence on more media friendly, aspects of its lineage.

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<sup>11</sup> In his 2001 book, theatre critic Aleks Sierz attempts to define a shared sensibility in the plays that emerged in this last decade of the twentieth century and the movement eventually came to be known by the title of Sierz’s book ‘In-yer-face theatre’. This genre of theatre is most closely associated with playwrights such as Sarah Kane, Jez Butterworth, Martin McDonagh, Joe Penhall and Mark Ravenhill, in part simply because of their grouping together in Sierz’s publication (Sierz, 2001: xi-xii; Little & McLaughlin, 2007: 283-367). The assemblage of these these writers under the ‘in-yer-face’ banner has been recognised in scholarship as problematic as it elides crucial differences between these writers and their work.

<sup>12</sup> See <https://royalcourttheatre.com/about/history/> [accessed on Dec. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017].

In the 1990s, the Court also gleaned programming lessons from the first decade of its own genesis. Artistic Director Stephen Daldry (1992-1998) expressly followed Devine's strategy in programming new plays in quick succession in the three spaces available to the theatre during the Court's temporary sojourn to a theatre in the West End, whilst the Sloane Square building underwent a much-needed restructuring. The intention was to create an excitement, a creative tumult at the Court according to Little and McLaughlin, who refer to Daldry's approach as opportunistic, entrepreneurial and seductive (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 284).<sup>13</sup>

The late 1960s and early 1970s did not have a single unique movement around which a myth could coalesce, and with three distinct directorships and four Artistic Directors who did not always have harmonious relations, it would be difficult for the Court of this era to have self-marketed any such movement well. The absence of a similar range and depth of scholarly commentary regarding 1968-1975 may be attributable, at least in part, to a lack of a specific marketable movement equivalent to 'kitchen sink' or 'in-yer-face'. Despite its lack of single characteristic or its erstwhile neglect, the 1968-1975 period at the Court deserves closer scrutiny, not least because it was a time when female and minority playwrights were provided with a significant platform at the theatre.

### **The need to examine the culture at the Court 1968-1975**

This thesis does not seek to contest the fact that there was unease at the Court in the early 1970s. It is clear from every available research source, minutes of meetings and information that has been extrapolated from interviews conducted with a wide selection of Court associates, that the first half of the 1970s was not a harmonious era at the Sloane Square theatre. In this thesis, the causes of this unease are evinced and examined to determine if they uniquely stemmed from a generational tussle or a reductive 'humanist' and 'political'

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<sup>13</sup> It is salutary to note that scholarship acknowledges the success of the Court in the 1990s stemmed in part from substantial overseas funding and the temporary re-housing of the Court in the theatrical heartland of the capital (Bolton, 2011: 59).

dichotomy predicated on opposing artistic praxis, or if the tensions in the Court of this period were more firmly related to an internal culture rooted in empire which dictated the dynamics of the theatre to an extent previously unacknowledged. It is this latter question that is of specific interest as its exploration provides a new contribution to knowledge. This thesis considers how far new directions in theatre challenged this specific culture and the Court's institutional habitus, and to what extent this challenge was the greater cause of unease at the Court during this era. Additionally and importantly, this thesis will explore if this threat to the institutional habitus of the Court and to the dynamics of British society at large, have also latterly contributed to an imbalance in scholarship on the institution during the early 1970s, and particularly as regards the interpretation of Lewenstein's artistic directorship of the Court.

This thesis addresses this research gap by scrutinising primary source evidence to consider thoroughly how far strife at the Court was genuinely caused by differing views on theatre-making. It considers the extent to which intergenerational differences and any lack of support for emerging writers can be blamed for tensions, and to identify what other factors may have been work such as a defensiveness regarding foreign influences in a climate of British declinism. This study further explores if Lewenstein's artistic directorship can be described as a reaction against the last vestiges of imperialism and its culture at the Court. This thesis examines how far the specific expectations of the emergent 1970s playwrights may have spurred Lewenstein, a socialist, to take contrary action and to instead programme playwrights from minority demographics. This research considers the extent to which Lewenstein's fostering of non-British playwrights, non-white playwrights and female playwrights was to later bare the Court fruit, although his achievements have been poorly recognised by scholarship. In asserting that the Court during the 1968-1975 period was more progressive than has been previously acknowledged, this thesis posits that the reputation of this era deserves to be better researched and re-assessed.

## **Theoretical framework**

It is now standard, to the point of being almost expected in interviews, for the emergent white male English playwrights of the 1970s to accuse the hostile old guard at the Court of this era of being oblivious to the radical changes the former believe they were pioneering at the time. For example, Wright sees their movement as heralding a profound transformation:

As the 1950s produced a generation of playwrights who accepted the theatre that they found, but questioned what could be said within it, so the 1970s produced a generation of playwrights who questioned not only what the theatre said but what theatre was, where it should happen and how. (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 123)

The Court's programme in the 1970s immediately suggests that the Court was indeed embracing new theatre, and consistently included works by the emergent 1970s writers. This contradiction begs the question of why scholarship on Court history gives so much credence to a singular interpretation of the early 1970s by a small group of white middle-class male English playwrights who could not claim to be objective, and, indeed, who were invested parties. It further raises the issue of why this privileging of their account has not yet been properly interrogated in scholarship. It appears that the accepted understanding of the history of the Court remains largely the preserve of a privileged elite, even though the institution itself has since endeavored, with a degree of success, to distance itself from such a homogenous culture.

### **i. Habitus**

The theories of the French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu and his concept of 'habitus', and particularly the Bourdieu-inspired notion of 'institutional habitus' I have found useful as a means of understanding this contradiction at the Court. Bourdieu's theories are employed in this research to examine the extent to which a defensive power structure at the Court was responsible for resisting the rise of a non-patrician demographic at the institution. I am aware of the reservations scholars, such as Atkinson, have expressed regarding the concept of institutional habitus, specifically its potential to overstretch and reduce the explanatory power of Bourdieu's theories, particularly in the field of research in education

(Atkinson, 2011). Bourdieu's concept of habitus is, nonetheless, useful in determining and understanding how far surface events are generated from structures and rules of practice that lie beneath (Ransome, 2010: 327).

The term 'habitus' was coined from 'habitual', or that which is done on a recurrent basis to the point that it is a habit, an action rendered largely unquestioned and widely accepted as 'how things are'. Bourdieu's notion of habitus is that of a complex structure built of a person's history and reinforced by repeated or habitual actions. Bourdieu proposes that one's social environment, formative experiences, gender, ethnicity, class and religious background, provide structures which in turn prompt a specific way of interpreting the world and guide one's opinions and expectations. Using Bourdieu's theory, power can be seen as a culturally crafted force, bolstered jointly by agency and structure. According to the French philosopher, habitus is neither a result of free will, nor is it wholly determined by structures. Rather, it is created by a level of engagement between the two over time – which ultimately leads to leanings, tastes and opinions that are informed by past events *and* which shape current practices and, crucially, condition our perceptions of these (Bourdieu 1984: 170). A person's individual history is constitutive of their habitus, but the concept has also been applied to a collective history, for example, that of an institution (Reay, 2004: 434). Institutional habitus leads to a distinctive, collective outlook and informs how constituent members of an institution interact, view each other, and understand and interpret the world around them. Viewed through the lens of habitus, it is possible to understand how the expectations and dispositions of groups and the structure and dynamics of their practices are formed and defined by the forces operating within their own particular social sphere. Often unwittingly, people of a shared habitus will gravitate towards one another and create invisible boundaries between their own and other collectives. Over time, distinctions will be continuously re-enforced and their tastes and opinions become the standard within an institution. The scope and limits of this habitus remain unseen, unconsidered and unquestioned.

Whilst it could be argued that Bourdieu's concept of habitus has much in common with the general concept of 'culture', it is the unwitting, subconscious element that is important to this study. With habitus, there is more emphasis on how our basic understanding, perception and interpretation of our world is influenced by the complex set of social structures within which we live, to the point that it is largely subconscious and it is not driven by agency alone. Crucially, Bourdieu poses that habitus is created through a social, rather than individual, process and it is this aspect that leads to patterns that are not only enduring and transferrable from one context to another, but that can also shift in relation to specific contexts and over time, as society evolves. Therefore, with this theory, Bourdieu presents power as subconsciously forged by culture and upheld by structure and agency.

This significant subconscious element to habitus has been criticised as it appears to exonerate the individual (Sullivan, 2002: 151). It is precisely this unconscious aspect that is useful for this study, however. The lack of conscious agency permits a broad comprehension of how privileged playwrights whose plays often highlighted the injustices meted out to marginalised communities, can simultaneously, and without apparent sense of irony, resent having to share a stage they see as their inheritance with those same subaltern groups. It also aids to some extent, in understanding how this contradiction has not been hitherto properly interrogated in scholarship. Over the course of this research, I have also found useful the theories of Bourdieu's compatriot Michel Foucault and his writings on power. Foucault poses that a dominant culture, the demographic in power, is that which establishes the cultural norm. Thereafter, according to Foucault, this dominant group communicate their ethos, conventions, culture and worldview through hegemonic discourses which alienate and distance, and potentially exclude, the powerless in society.

It would be disingenuous not to recognise here also how and to what extent my own habitus and cultural background have informed my perception of this period of Court history. I am an Irish woman from a native Irish family and I grew up in Ireland at a time when it was a strikingly homogeneous country. I moved to France as a young adult, where I

spent two years. After a brief time spent back in Ireland, I then relocated to Budapest, Hungary, where I lived for eleven years. I speak French and Hungarian. I moved to the UK to take an MA in Creative Writing in 2008 and have stayed ever since. Therefore, I have lived as an expatriate from my native Ireland, in various countries and cultures not my own, for over twenty years. My adult life has been markedly defined by my significant experience as an outsider, in contrast to my youth. This has resulted in my sensitivity and alertness to how social, ethnic and cultural groups work to either include or exclude others, from language use to conventions. Rather than my habitus being an obstacle to my research here, I am convinced that by virtue of my outsider perspective, I am able to see power structures and behaviours that a constituent member of the indigenous culture would find difficult to perceive. Therefore, I believe my own experiences and my own habitus have made me a good candidate to carry out this particular research. I acknowledge that my habitus could lead to biases and for this reason, I am careful to cross check findings with evidence including theatre programmes and archival material.

## **ii. Postcolonialism**

In attempting to fully comprehend specifics of the social and political climate of the triumvirate era and the Lewenstein years, my reading brought me to the work of Benjamin Poore. In his studies *Heritage, Nostalgia and Modern British Theatre* (Poore, 2012) and *Theatre and Empire* (Poore, 2016), Poore explores how the Victorians were transformed in 1960s theatre into a metaphor for examining the state-of-the-nation and the concept of ‘Britishness’. Poore’s work is particularly enlightening in evincing British theatre’s preoccupation with its empire and to examining the empire’s disproportionately strong presence on British stages, during this period. This thesis expands and builds upon Poore’s work insofar as it reflects on the impact of the demise of the British Empire and how the legacy of imperial culture had strong and traceable impact on the power structures at the Court. Viewing the Sloane Square institution via the prism of Poore’s studies, this thesis demonstrates that unease at the Court in this era can be considered in a postcolonial light.



At this juncture, it is useful to reflect on the term ‘subaltern’ which is frequently employed in this study to refer to marginalised or less heeded communities. The word was coined by Antonio Gramsci to mean ‘of inferior rank’ and was initially used to identify groups excluded from a society’s established institutions, those denied the means by which people have a voice in society and are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes (Ashcroft, B. Griffiths, G., Tiffin, H., 1995: 199). When, in the 1970s, the study of colonialism and imperialism began to focus on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonised people, the term was appropriated by postcolonial studies, specifically in *Subaltern Studies* (Guha, 1982: vii). It came to refer primarily to populations which are socially, politically and geographically outside of a hegemonic power structure of the colony. The term was often used to identify groups who are heard only if they conform to the dominant culture. For these reasons, the term feels appropriate for my study. The word was later problematised within the field of postcolonialism by Gayatri Spivak, who warned against an overly broad or essentialist application of the term, and particularly its use as a code word for the proletariat (Ashcroft, B. Griffiths, G., Tiffin, H., 1995: 201; Spivak, 1985b: 27). In this research ‘subaltern’ is used to directly and specifically refer to groups who were rendered without agency, who had their own culture subverted directly by colonialism, and particularly that of the British Empire (the black populations of South Africa and the Caribbean and the Irish). Mindful of Spivak’s reservations, I do not use the term in reference to women, for example, but to groups who were emerging from the colonial experience. Nonetheless, whilst recognising that there are issues surrounding the use of the word, I find it to be the most accurate and fitting term to use collectively in this thesis for the Irish, black and other postcolonial ethnic populations, to contrast with the dominant cultural group at the Court, i.e. the white English.

In measuring the extent to which the power structures at the Court were threatened and defensive during this era, this research also draws on the work of Paul Gilroy and his concept of ‘postcolonial melancholia’ from his book of the same name. Gilroy uses this notion to adapt the concept of melancholia from its Freudian understanding and apply it to

the social pathology of neoimperialist politics. Gilroy's analysis reveals melancholic reactions in the hostility towards subaltern groups and a reluctance, even inability, to value the multiculturalism that emerged in the 1970s.

## **Methodology**

This thesis provides a re-evaluation of the 1968-1975 era at the Court and allocates the scholarly attention to these years that has, to a degree, been hitherto denied. I address this imbalance of scholarship drawing on both quantitative and qualitative research methodology. I utilise primary source material, tracing and evaluating programming innovations at the Court during the early 1970s, and the Lewenstein years in particular. I consider the impact of these advances, both immediate and far-reaching and contend that the Court of the early 1970s made a significant contribution to the advancements of British drama and British theatre and therefore is deserving of closer academic attention. This aim is achieved by closely considering programme evidence from the Court of the early 1970s, studying documents from Court archives, interviewing key figures who had first-hand dealings with the Court during this era and measuring and cross checking their comments against evidence. By employing these approaches, this thesis evinces and maps a more nuanced and precise history of the Sloane Square institution during this specific era than currently exists.

### **i. Archives**

Hoarding is an ancient human endeavour which has ultimately led to the existence of museums and libraries. Likewise, the modern practice of collecting and archiving theatre related material is not without precedence; the Ancient Athenians kept records of the annual theatre contest, the Festival of Dionysus, and are believed to have done so since the late sixth century BCE (Macintosh in Wilkes and Dimkowski, 2013: 268). In the 1920s, theatre enthusiast Gabrielle Enthoven bequeathed her extensive collection of theatrical programmes and memorabilia to the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, thus founding that museum's

performance collection, and playing a vital role in the establishment of the ‘theatre archive’ as an entity in the modern world.

In the past quarter century, the archives of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court have been donated to the Victoria & Albert Museum, as have archives of independent related figures, including that of Lewenstein. These collections are currently held by the museum at Blythe House, Hammersmith in West London. Naturally, it was this specific collection that I first consulted as I began my research enquiry into the Court during the 1968-1975 era. The English Stage Company collection comprises of photographs, business documents and quotidian correspondence between many of the key Court figures. Such documents include: memos, meeting minutes, letters and notes from that pre-internet age, many in copy form, on thin paper, and stamped accordingly. In this way, the archive proved an informative entry point to the world of the Court in the 1968-1975. More importantly, it was by visiting this archive that I first became aware of the shadow of the imperial age that still lingered over the Court during these years.

From programmes, I learned the cost of theatre tickets. From adverts in these publications I gleaned that attending the Court was an ‘occasion’ for many audience members. It was an event that might merit a pre-show meal in a local restaurant or new clothes from boutiques on the King’s Road. Several effusive thank-you cards from Court associates such as Jane Asher, reveal that flowers were commonly given to females and that they were clearly expected to compose notes of appreciation in return. Correspondence at this time was largely achieved via typed letters, and these letters were often reworked with pen for afterthoughts and edits written in handwriting difficult for the modern reader to decipher and with language less formal than in the main text. The main body of text frequently has a formal syntax, phraseology and tone that seems almost Victorian. Women are often addressed as ‘Miss’ or ‘Mrs’, even when the author and addressee are acquainted. Letters normally enquire as to the health of family members, usually wives, and then frequently sign off formally with some variation of: ‘with very best wishes, yours sincerely’.

As I began to read Court correspondence into the 1970s, however, I noted an occasional but intriguing shift in approach. For example, a letter dated Aug. 24<sup>th</sup>, 1970, from Nicholas Wright, the manager of the Theatre Upstairs, to *Time Out*'s John Ford. This is a typed business letter and it is laid out as such with a 'ref.', an 'Enc.' and a 'P.S.'; yet, within the body of the letter Wright employs language such as 'prick', 'the straight press' and 'stuff' to refer to copy. Wright signs off with a simple 'thanks'.<sup>14</sup> This letter sits in contrast to correspondence written by Wright five days previously to the publisher Marion Boyars at Calder and Boyars Publishing Firm Ltd. In that letter, he requests the use of Beckett's short play *Come and Go* (1965) for the *Come Together Festival*. Wright provides Boyar's title as 'Miss Marion Boyars'. This letter is laid out in the manner of Wright's letter to Ford, yet, his language here is typically polite, old-fashioned and formal and he completes the letter: 'I hope you're well and that you had a good holiday. With best wishes. Yours sincerely, Nicholas Wright.'<sup>15</sup> The mention of a holiday indicates that they were acquainted, so the formality of the letter is particularly striking beside the informality of his communication with *Time Out*. The co-existence of these two forms of the English language suggested to me that there were two cultures in operation at the Court and I was curious to explore how they co-existed.

Other aspects of the archive also began to reveal this world to me. It was interesting to note from photographs in the archive that attitudes that were at the time seen as progressive, now appear the reverse. Images perhaps intending to showcase bold sexual freedom at Sloane Square, can now be interpreted otherwise. A John Haynes' photograph of a naked woman surrounded by a number of fully clothed men in a rehearsal shot of the Court production *Lay By* (1970), for example, from a modern day perspective feels particularly misogynistic and predatory. This is not only due to the theme and intent of the

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<sup>14</sup> A letter dated August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1970, from Theatre Upstairs Manager Nicholas Wright to John Ford, *Time Out* Magazine. The English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/4/1/78).

<sup>15</sup> A letter dated August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1970, from Theatre Upstairs Manager Nicholas Wright to Marion Boyars, Calder and Boyars Publishing Ltd. The English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/4/1/78).

play, but because nakedness at the Court, when it occurred, was almost always an unclothed female and clothed males.

As is often the case, it is not only the facts stated in documents that help conjure the period for the researcher but of equal interest and use is all that which is inferred and unwittingly relayed. For example, bald anti-Irish sentiments expressed without qualm in 1973 by senior members of Arts Council England to the Artistic Director of the Court are not under embargo like other correspondence in this archive, presumably because they are not deemed particularly offensive, then or indeed now.<sup>16</sup> Having viewed examples of all the aforementioned material, I began to form an *impression* of the Court of the early 1970s that was linked more strongly than it seemed aware to its imperialist, patriarchal past. It was this impression that prompted me to consider how deeply felt was the impact and reverberations of the decline of empire on the Court during this period.

I wondered if other London institutions of this era displayed equal evidence of being unwittingly or subconsciously influenced by the past. A visit to the *Time Out* archives at the magazine's headquarters in London shows that that this was not quite the case, at least not to the same extent as at the Court. The *Time Out* publications of this era display evidence of being far more in-step with the *zeitgeist* than the Court. The reason for my visit to *Time Out*'s archives was to research the magazine's reportage of the 1970 *Come Together Festival* at the Court. I was immediately struck by how very modern and fashionable the *Time Out* office is; it is bright and open plan with bean bags and recreation areas. This design appears to take its cue from tech companies, which are now at the vanguard of work culture. It is a look that sits in stark comparison to the more haphazard, *ad hoc* nature of the original office in the late 1960s. Yet, it could be argued that *Time Out* has not changed greatly inasmuch as today's office is a reflection of how closely *Time Out* remains aligned with contemporary and forward facing trends – *Time Out* has always had its finger on the pulse. Accordingly, the magazine's publications from the 1968-1975 era present

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<sup>16</sup> Correspondence regarding *The Freedom of the City* by Brian Friel, English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/4/1/98).

advertisements and articles fluent in the new parlance of that era, confident in the new attitude and relentlessly mirroring the new trends. Corrections and apologies are informal and playful: ‘In the last edition I managed to call David Halliwell’s new show “Muck from Three Angles”, “Muck from Three Angels” and “Music from the Angels”... Whereas, of course, its real title is... no, that can’t be right... See it at Quipu Basement Theatre.’<sup>17</sup> Nudity is also common – but both male and female, as can be seen in an advert for *Jeremy* – ‘the magazine for people who don’t care about sex’.<sup>18</sup> The *Time Out* archive reflects a cultural shift in British society in the late 1960s. This shift is not so ubiquitously demonstrated in the Court archives of this era where a more traditional language, culture and attitude was clearly still dominant.

For the researcher, a marked drawback of the Court’s archive at Blythe House is that a great deal of the material has been filed with an embargo. One can only assume that these documents are sensitive, potentially offensive or litigious. Their absence is both tantalising and frustrating. For this reason, the personal archive of Donald Howarth has proved of great value for my research. Howarth was kind enough to provide me with unrestricted access to his collection at his home. This access facilitated a full immersion in the world of the Court 1968-1975. Howarth has lived at 9 Lower Mall in Hammersmith, the former residence of both George Devine and Tony Richardson, since the late 1950s when Howarth was a Court playwright. The address has been a key meeting point for Court figures for many years, and a number of senior Court personnel have lived at the address periodically over the decades, including Peter Gill, Nicholas Wright and David Lan.

Howarth had earlier collated some items from his archive in a scrap-book, for what was an aborted attempt at a book in the mid-1970s. The vast majority of the archive, however, remains in piles of envelopes and folders on table-tops, in two large cupboards, in three black sacks, five boxes, four deep drawers and seven stacks. There are scripts, programmes, newspaper cuttings, photographs, invitations and postcards from the great and

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<sup>17</sup> *Time Out*, April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1970.

<sup>18</sup> *Time Out*, August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1969.

good of mid-century theatre. Much of the paper is foxed with age and occasional tears are taped with yellowed sticky-tape. In general, despite its disorganised appearance, this is an archive assembled over decades with care, attention and love.

Correspondence in Howarth's archive is far too great in quantity to list here but it includes some very interesting documents of significant interest to modern theatre historians. There are postcards from Samuel Beckett to Howarth commenting on Howarth's 1980 production of *Waiting for Godot* (1953). Howarth had written previously to Beckett saying that the that he found 'the scene with Pozzo was the most difficult to realise'. Beckett replies: '[the] Pozzo [scene] / indeed unsatisfactory. Needs to be abridged and some of the business (e.g. with pipe) scrapped.'<sup>19</sup> There are stacks of holiday photographs of which a very small sample include: Richardson snorkeling in Mexico, Lewenstein in Wales, and Jocelyn Herbert and Devine in France. There are postcards from Osborne to Howarth, from a number of Osborne's wives to Howarth, Peggy Ashcroft to Howarth, Judy Dench to Howarth, Jill Bennet to Howarth, Diana Dors to Howarth and Ian McKellen to George Goetschius. There are pen drawings of rhinoceroses by Eugène Ionesco.

For me, however, it was the wry comments and the gossip in all the correspondence that revealed much about the internal politics and the friendships and the alliances at the Court, and proved useful for my research. It soon became clear, for example, that Anderson's obstreperousness was widely viewed with amusement, and was not taken very seriously by anyone at the Court. I garnered a general impression that Sloane Square comprised a tight-knit group who, despite their frequent differences of opinion, dined and holidayed and socialised together, and, in those pre-Internet days, wrote each other a lot of letters and playful postcards. They were in constant contact and communication. They were also, very largely, white English male and Oxbridge-educated. I ascertained a sense of how their easy repartee and in-jokes also served to keep outsiders at bay.

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<sup>19</sup> Postcard from Samuel Beckett to Donald Howarth, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1980. Donald Howarth's personal archive, 9 Lower Mall, London.

## ii. Interviews

As the period in focus is within recent memory, a majority of the key players are still alive, though are now elderly. I considered it crucial for my research to hear first-hand accounts and, if necessary and/or possible, interrogate their statements directly where they might run contrary to documentary evidence. I drew up a list of potential interviewees and approached them via email, a contact normally provided by a mutual acquaintance. Hare declined my interview request but, through his agent, suggested I acquire his autobiography *The Blue Touch Paper* (2015) and focus particularly on chapters six and seven. I bought the book and refer to it and quote from it in my research. Two requests for an interview with Edgar, via his agent Judy Daish, went unanswered. I also emailed Gaskill, describing the focus of my study and asked if he would be willing to speak with me. He declined, replying: ‘You can write me down as the last of the pre PC generation. I had no agenda but quality. Can’t be of much use.’<sup>20</sup> Unbeknownst to me, Gaskill was seriously ill at the time of our correspondence and, sadly, died four months later. I met Anthony Page socially and provided him with a rough outline of the focus of my research. He subsequently emailed and invited me for tea to talk further. I readily agreed, planning to explain my research in more detail and request a formal interview. Finding a date to suit him proved elusive and the meeting never came to pass. I interviewed a very cooperative Margaretta D’Arcy by phone, wrote up my notes from our conversation and emailed them to D’Arcy for approval, in accordance with normal procedure. However, having spoken to her lawyer, D’Arcy subsequently emailed to request that the vast majority of her comments not be published, permitting one line only. D’Arcy is an activist whose opposition to militarism has, quite recently and at an advanced age, seen her imprisoned in Ireland. Understandably, she is wary of any potential legal issues. I respected her request and have used only the one permitted comment from the interview with D’Arcy.

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<sup>20</sup> Email from Bill Gaskill to Sue Healy, declining her request for an interview, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015.



Therefore, the selection of interviewees in the thesis was shaped not only by those I considered important to this narrative, but also by those who were willing to speak to me on record. The figures who graciously granted me their time and comments were: Max Stafford-Clark, Nicholas Wright, Donald Howarth, D'Arcy, Jim Haynes, David Gothard, Athol Fugard and Elyse Dodgson. Mindful of the need for an ethical and fair approach, I informed each interviewee that I would note down their responses during our interview and later email a typed transcript of our conversation back to the interviewee, for final approval. I trained and worked as a journalist for many years, so this approach was easiest for me but it also allowed the interviewee to later change, tweak or edit a comment if they later felt a remark was not exactly what they wished to state on record, or indeed, if they felt they had been misquoted. Some interviewees were active in their revisions, the majority less so. I then adapted the comments according to any edits they requested in their approval email. It is this final approved version of the interviews that I draw on in this study. I believe this was the most ethical approach and one which suited both parties.

In interviewing these figures, I was mindful of the fact that a significant aspect of this thesis is a criticism of the prioritisation of verbatim interviews in scholarship on the Court. I was keen not to repeat this approach in my own study and replicate this problem. For this reason, the statements and commentary provided by interviewees are cross-checked with documentary evidence, often programme records, and any discrepancies are noted herein. One common feature of the interviews I carried out was the experience of an interviewee providing unsolicited repetition of extant knowledge and reciting well-documented anecdotes. This issue may have been partly due to the elderly profile of the interviewees; an age wherein there is a natural tendency to repeat accounts of key episodes from one's own narrative. I recognise also that repetition of familiar stories was often a helpful gesture, to provide me with context on the narrative, at least as they perceived it. In such cases, even if I was very well acquainted with the story, I listened as the interviewee repeated the familiar story. If I was aware of a discrepancy between their version of events and documentary evidence I had unearthed in research, I then presented this information to

the interviewee afterwards and asked for their thoughts. Invariably, these incidents evinced fresh commentary, frequently interest or surprise, and, at times, a defensiveness. On two occasions the documentary evidence was ignored by the interviewee. I came to understand that a received narrative can occasionally be so ingrained that no challenge is truly welcome or accepted, despite documentary evidence. All my interviews were informative and enlightening, and I remain truly grateful to all these figures who so generously provided me with their time and thoughts on this period.

### **Chapter breakdown**

To locate the Court within the social and theatrical ecology of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Chapter One of this thesis examines in detail the wider social, cultural, political and economic terrain of the era, before narrowing its focus to the theatrical topography. This chapter specifically regards the impact of social shifts on the broad theatrical landscape, and at the Court in particular. There is initial focus on the impact of *The Theatres Act* of 1968 which abolished the state censorship of theatre and removed the powers previously invested in the Lord Chamberlain to license plays for performance, a constitutional change in which the Court played a part. This is followed by an inspection of the physical theatrical progressions during this era as theatre moved from the traditional single-authored proscenium arch performances provided by the writers of the 1960s, to the alternative world of devised, non-traditional loci and interactive performance favoured by many writers of the early 1970s. There is consideration of the impact this radical change in approach to theatre had on the Sloane Square institution.

Chapter One demonstrates that, by the early 1970s, the Court was out-of-step with new thrusts in theatre elsewhere in the UK, and in the USA, as the Sloane Square institution remained a decidedly white, male, middle-class and English in its constitution. The Court is compared with other progressive performance venues in London active during that same period and specifically alternative venues that were fostering and facilitating playwrights

from minority groups and subaltern sections of society. Drawing on primary source evidence and interviews with key figures from this time at the Court, Chapter One reflects on criticism that the theatre was slow to embrace new directions in theatre, and ponders how far the emergent playwrights of the 1970s are justified in claiming they were unsupported by the Court during these years. I explore the reported tensions between the young 1970s writers, including: Hare, Edgar, Brenton, Griffiths, Wilson and Barker, and the management: Gaskill, Artistic Director (1965-1968), and in co-directorship with Page and Anderson (1968-1972) and later, Lewenstein (1972-1975).

This chapter further assess overtures to the alternative scene, such as the opening of the Theatre Upstairs and the programming of the *Come Together Festival* in 1970. It establishes if they were, to a degree, gestural in nature rather than a genuine attempt by the Court to incorporate the new in its programme. This chapter evaluates how the Court's engagement with the alternative scene has been reported in the received narrative. Chapter One further explores the value and contribution of the Theatre Upstairs and considers how respected it was within Court culture and ponders the attitude of the emergent playwrights to being programmed therein. This chapter further considers the extent to which work by the young 1970s playwrights at the Court was aligned with that of alternative theatre. By inspecting the broader theatrical terrain of the period and considering the funding available to both fringe theatres and National Portfolio theatres, the first chapter regards the possibility that there might have been alternative reasons for the young 1970s playwrights to seek a platform at other theatres.

Chapter One examines claims that the young playwrights were unsupported by the Court because their work was deemed too 'political' and was not of the 'humanist' tradition the Court favoured. I compare and contrast works programmed at the Court by both the so-called 'humanist' playwrights of the 1960s and the 'political' playwrights of the 1970s, and gauge if these labels are justified, or to what extent they may have acted as a distraction from a larger issue at play. This chapter ponders if there are other

reasons the emerging 1970s playwrights may recall this era in a negative light and considers why their perspective has become the dominant narrative.

Chapter Two explores the impact of the demise of the British Empire on the national psyche during these years and ponders how this decline informed the arts and culture of the era, and how specifically the Court reacted. This chapter investigates the extent to which an insecurity regarding Britain's loss of influence may have fuelled anxiety and tensions in society, and at the Court. This chapter further considers the extent of suspicion of foreign theatre, particularly the alternative movement which was largely viewed as 'American'. Relatedly, this chapter ponders a puzzling waning of support for non-white playwrights at the Court during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In contemplating plays programmed at the Court during this period, this chapter will examine the consistent artistic preoccupation with the powerful Victorian and Edwardian eras during the 1960s and 1970s, at the Court and more broadly, and consider how this specific interest in the imperial era can be interpreted. This chapter explores an apparent fear of dethronement within the ranks of both the upper-classes and newly influential middle-classes, and investigates how this tension may have manifested at the Sloane Square institution.

Refracted through postcolonial optics and adopting Bourdieu's theory of habitus as a framework, this chapter explores how the decline of the British Empire influenced and informed the power structure of the Court, and its decision making and programming up until 1972. Chapter Two determines if there was a reluctance to champion non-British theatre and if so, what this may reveal about the culture at the Court. Viewing the triumvirate period through this postcolonial prism, this chapter also asks to what degree the privileged background of the young 1970s playwrights fed their, perhaps subconscious, resistance to subaltern and female playwrights. Finally, Chapter Two maps commentary on empire in three Osborne plays at the Court, which span the late 1950s to the early 1970s.

Chapter Three explores Lewenstein's tenure (1972-1975) and explores why his artistic directorship has been given comparatively little attention in scholarship on the Court. This chapter reveals how an interpretation of the Lewenstein years as insignificant is an inaccurate one, and yet it has become the dominant narrative. Chapter Three investigates how far and why such an understanding of his artistic directorship has been retrospectively constructed, and subsequently reinforced by commentary delivered by key English playwrights, then emerging but now established. This chapter further examines the extent to which the reputation of Lewenstein's artistic directorship has become unfairly enmeshed with that of the preceding triumvirate era (1969-1972). In challenging the reputation of the Lewenstein era, this final chapter will precisely ring-fence, then interrogate, this accepted account of the Lewenstein years at the Court. It regards the plays Lewenstein programmed and the writers he championed. In doing so, it facilitates an alternative history to emerge, one that demonstrates that, contrary to accepted wisdom, the Lewenstein era was a radical time of seed-sowing, of fostering talents from marginalised sections of society including those from the black, Irish and female demographics.

Chapter Three advances my argument that Lewenstein's provision of a platform to writers from minority groups was not only an important departure from the Court's previous approach to programming, but that it was also an action far more in step with new directions in theatre-making in the early 1970s. In considering why a more accurate and positive account of this era may have been elided, this chapter explores the extent to which Lewenstein's attitude towards the institutional habitus of the Court was informed and spurred by his own position as an establishment outsider. It demonstrates that the young English playwrights could have felt excluded and displaced at the Court under Lewenstein because, in contrast to the playwrights he fostered, they could not claim to represent a subaltern demographic. Having explored the reasons for the occlusion of Lewenstein's positive contribution to the history of the Court, I examine the extent to which the negative perception of the era supplied by white male English playwrights has been privileged by scholarship. I consider the implications and dangers of such privileging in scholarship.

The concluding section of this thesis considers the significance of this research for the present day culture at the Court. I show how the Court would benefit from reclaiming and celebrating its achievements during Lewenstein's tenure. I consider the Court's more recent programming and evaluate how far the Court has progressed since the 1970s. I contemplate what can be gained and learned from past mis-steps, and how these lessons can potentially be applied to benefit the present and the future of the Royal Court Theatre.

## Chapter One

### Positioning the Royal Court on the Theatrical Landscape of 1968-1975



From left: David Hare, John Osborne, E.A. Whitehead and David Storey. Photograph: Times Newspapers Ltd.

May 9th, 1971, fifteen years and a day after the legendary debut of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, the *Sunday Times* heralded the Court's new season with a new photograph taken outside the Sloane Square institution. Heading an article which enthuses about a fresh season at the Court, the photograph depicts Osborne flanked by three other white Englishmen, all established or emerging Court playwrights: David Storey, E.A. Whitehead and Hare, whose work would show in Sloane Square throughout the forthcoming season. The assumed intention of this gathering of the institution's leading playwrights was to signal to the nation that the Court remained the home of the most important, urgent writing of the day, and that its playwrights were the cream of each generation, from the 'angry young men' through to the emerging younger generation of 1970s dramatists. With this image, the Court aimed to reinforce its reputation as the theatre with its finger firmly on the

pulse of modern playwriting in Britain; that it remained contemporary and was continuing a tradition of fostering and championing new writing, from generation to generation.

Ironically, a closer consideration of the photograph, particularly in light of its temporal context, suggests a contrary narrative. In showcasing a homogenous line-up of white male English playwrights, the Court unwittingly reveals that it is either disinterested in or unaware of the rising importance of minority identity theatre, which included but was not limited to, plays by black, female, gay and immigrant playwrights. Much had changed socially, culturally and politically in the fifteen years since Osborne's Court debut. The theatrical terrain had been redefined by the tumult of 1968 and the rise in profile of alternative theatre in Britain. Alternative theatre had strong counter-culture affiliations and also frequently focused on subaltern social worlds. Refracted through this prism of postcolonialism and feminism, the Court's photograph of its leading playwrights in 1971 appears mildly incongruous. With its largely white male English programme, the institution unwittingly demonstrated that it was at some variance with this trend for diversity. The Court was failing to provide a platform for minority playwrights and female playwrights. This chapter, therefore, considers how far the legal, social and cultural changes of the late 1960s affected programming at the Court, and explores to what extent, and in what ways and how far the social shifts failed to have impact on the Court. The rise of the alternative movement is also mapped here and the manner and scope of how the Court engaged with this new form of theatre is particularly considered.

### **1.1 A reflection on criticism of the Court during this era**

The young 1970s playwrights, led by Hare (pictured), Wilson, Brenton and Edgar, have claimed that, during the Court's triumvirate leadership (1969-1972) and later throughout Lewenstein's directorship (1972-1975), the Court had fallen out of step with contemporary developments in theatre. They have variously stated that they were not supported by the Sloane Square theatre during this era because the management was of a different generation and did not look favorably on their work as it was overtly political.



Thus, these playwrights have placed the blame for the Court's loss of direction during these years on the institution's reluctance to embrace their self-described political theatre, the artistic management's dislike of the rising alternative scene and a generational power wrangle (Hampton in Doty, Harbin, 1990: 104; Hare in Roberts, 1999: 100; Hare in Doty, Harbin, 1990: 148; Hare in Findlater, 1981: 142; Hare in Devine, H., 2006: 152-153; Wright in Doty, Harbin, 1990: 100; Edgar in Devine, H. 2006: 11,100; Wright in Little & McLaughlin, 2007: 121; Findlater, 1981: 139; Little & McLaughlin, 2007: 122).

As has also been outlined at length in the Introduction, the emergent 1970s playwrights have retrospectively stated that, because the Court was not providing them with due attention, they were forced to seek support for their work elsewhere, at venues such as the National Theatre. Their narrative also consistently conflates the triumvirate and Lewenstein periods, despite the distinctly different character and agenda of the two time frames. This chapter investigates if these playwrights are correct in asserting that the Court was not in concert with emerging directions in theatre during the triumvirate artistic directorship (1969-1972), to what extent the Sloane Square theatre was neglecting these young playwrights, and how far the Court was favouring their work and the work of other white Englishmen, over that of the female and minority voice. This chapter examines the accusations made by the emergent 1970s playwrights, and shows that, although there was a degree of hesitancy on the part of the older management to embrace the new theatre trends during the triumvirate period, there was also a recognition that the Court needed to investigate new directions, so this reluctance was not as fervent or as entrenched as has come to be believed. This chapter reveals how far such accusations are misleading and suggests that these claims may act as a distraction from a more complicated and hitherto occluded narrative.

## 1.2 The social and historical context

In order to assess the extent of the Court's engagement with the theatrical shifts that occurred during this era, it is important to accurately recall the broader social, cultural, legal and political context of the period, both nationally and internationally. This is extant knowledge that has been widely explored in scholarship (Bull, 2017; Ansorge, 1975; Davies, 1987; Itzin, 1980; Megson, 2012; Sandbrook, 2007, 2011). The late 1960s are years that witnessed civil rights marches in the US and Europe, a radicalisation of the student population, the rise of feminism, of gay rights, trade unionism and the emergence of black power.

In accordance with this politicisation of society, and particularly that of the younger generation in the Western world, a rising diversity of voices in the arts was witnessed, and most significantly for this research, these voices were emerging on the alternative theatre scene more so than in the sphere of conventional artistic praxis. There has been ample academic study on the related growth in alternative theatre in the UK and elsewhere, and within that territory, the rising profile of theatre concerning and inspired by a greater prominence of identity politics, the subaltern and other minority communities. As Chris Megson describes, this was a time when, 'Theatre artists engaged with, and sought to shape, those new political and social realities in myriad ways' (Megson, 2012: 37). In accordance with the identity politics slogan 'the personal is political,' John McGrath, playwright, director and founder of the political theatre company 7:84, commented that theatre now required a different and greater level of personal involvement (Megson, 2012: 38). Correspondingly, the alternative domain was an area of theatre that often gave a platform to works by sections of society that had previously gone less heeded in theatre. Scholarship largely maps the birth of alternative theatre in Britain from the seminal year of 1968, the specific year many have credited for a political awakening.

Like Trussler and Catherine Itzin, historians Arthur Marwick and Bruce Schulman see 1968 as a hinge year; in their case it is the year that marks the beginning of the end of the 'High Sixties' (Marwick, 1999; Schulman, 2001). Marwick contends that the cultural

revolution which took place was an extended one running from 1958-1974. He refers to this period as ‘the Long Sixties’, positing that it was a more gradual time of revolution in terms of society, artistic standards and social values, which can be divided into three sub-periods. Marwick contends the era began with the ‘Low Sixties’ (1958-1963), an optimistic and relatively non-violent time which was then followed by the ‘High Sixties’ (1964-1968/9), where there was a climax of violence and protest. The final phase, he proposes was 1969-1974, was a time of cultural revolution in the Western world. Overarching the ‘Long Sixties’ was also an era of unparalleled affluence with the majority of homes having labour-saving electronic goods such as washing machines, and home entertainment in the form of T.V. sets, which combined to change society in fundamental ways and provide unprecedented leisure time. The 1950s had also seen the emergence of the ‘teenager’, a demographic which had newly acquired disposable income and a related independence and whose commercial power and prominence increased into the 1960s.

It is equally beneficial to revisit the specific legal changes that occurred at this time to gain insight into why there was suddenly such an emphasis on the hitherto less heeded sections of society. Understanding this aspect of the era highlights how curious it is that Court was not including subaltern or female playwrights in its line-up of leading talent. In Britain, the late 1960s witnessed a series of significant legal reforms which carried considerable social impact, and which in turn affected and informed the theatrical ecology of the era. The *1968 Theatres Act* which removed censorship powers from the Lord Chamberlain had, unsurprisingly, the most direct impact on theatre. Michéline Wandor suggests it is enlightening to locate this legal change within the context of other new laws to illuminate the impetus and desire for change these legal reforms prompted and, significantly, the determination in the theatrical world to ‘represent unheard voices’ (Wandor, 1993: 8, 13). These specific legal reforms empowered non-whites, homosexuals and women, all groups that had historically lacked privilege or platform.

Homosexuality was partially legalised in 1967 with the *Sexual Offences Act*, which had followed the *Wolfenden Report* (1957) that recommended the decriminalisation of

certain offences. *The Abortion Act* was also passed in 1967 and came into effect in April 1968. *The Race Relations Act* of 1968 made it illegal to refuse housing, employment, or public services to a person on the grounds of skin colour, race, or ethnic or national origins. This act also created the Community Relations Commission to promote 'harmonious community relations'. Family entered public discourse in 1969 when the *Divorce Reform Act* passed, coming into effect in January 1971, allowing couples to divorce following two years of separation. *The Equal Pay Act* of 1970 prohibited discriminatory treatment of women in terms of pay and conditions of employment. These new laws all additionally served to encourage public debate on social matters, and thus provided urgent material for contemporary theatre to address.

In cultural terms, milestone feminist texts *The Female Eunuch* (1968) and *Sexual Politics* (1970) were published and prompted a growing awareness of gender politics and informed discourse on feminism. In tandem with this thrust for equality between the sexes, social mobility was in motion as the working classes of the 1960s were reaping the rewards of the *Butler Education Act of 1944* which established the principle of free education for all, from primary to secondary. Later, the *Education Act of 1962* went further and granted an exemption for 'ordinarily resident', full-time, students from university tuition fees, along with introducing a right to a means-tested maintenance grant. Accordingly, more people than ever had access and opportunity to attend university and were now facilitated to do so. There was a notable spike in the student population in 1968. The late 1960s also saw the launch of the Open University which provided open access to all who wished to study at Higher Level. It was in 1968 that this student body also began to strongly voice their political opinions. As John Bull comments, the specific year of 1968 is generally held to have marked the political awakening of this generation (Bull, 1984: 8). Young playwrights of the era such as Brenton state they were politicised by the events of 1968 (Megson, 2013: 95). Much of the student discontent was rooted in a series of remarkable international events

which ignited political passions in that year and sent ripples far beyond that point in time.<sup>21</sup>

As Itzin notes:

Rarely can one year be singled out as an isolated turning point, but in the case of 1968 so many events coincided on a global scale that it clearly marked the end of an era in a historically unprecedented fashion, and the beginning of a period of equally unprecedented political consciousness and activism. (Itzin, 1980: 1)

These pan-national upheavals all fed into a call for change, for equality and brought with them a mistrust of the establishment and an impetus to challenge tradition and hierarchies. It was unquestionably a fraught period but also significant and progressive time for women, non-whites and other marginalised communities. Curiously, this fact is not reflected by the very white, male and English selection of playwrights asked to provide work for the Court's programme throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s.

### 1.3 The rise of alternative theatre

It is crucial to examine the interplay between the Court and the rise of alternative theatre during the late 1960s. The theatrical landscape in Britain was in flux at this time. There were new buildings and venues opening.<sup>22</sup> There was an expansion of public subsidy for theatre in the late 1960s (Findlater, 1981: 91, Roberts P., 1999: 115, Megson, 2012: 37, 64). The most significant development on the theatrical terrain in the late 1960s was the

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<sup>21</sup> The radical global occurrences Itzin refers to include the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, a suppression of a rebellion that came to be known as 'Prague Spring'. In Paris, the May *événements* witnessed both students and workers protesting against the state. Social unrest was also witnessed in Belgrade, Berlin, Mexico City, Milan, Tokyo and Warsaw. Tensions erupted in the U.S., where the Democratic Convention took place in Chicago against a backdrop of tear gas and tanks, whilst in Vietnam, the TET Offensive was put in motion, and became a bloody sea-change for the U.S. Army in that war. Accordingly, anti-Vietnam War protests erupted in the U.S. and Europe. 1968 was also the year in which Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were shot and killed. The Republican Richard Nixon was elected President of the U.S. There were anti-imperialist gains in Latin America. The year also marked the beginning of Palestinian violence against Israeli occupation. Fascists seized power in Greece. Economic sanctions were imposed on what was then known as Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). In Britain, anti-war protesters congregated in Grosvenor Square, some 30,000 strong (Findlater, 1981: 93; Roberts, 1988: 231). Civil rights campaigns sprung up in communities across the globe where basic human rights were being denied. In the Southern States of the US, the black population marched for desegregation. Similarly, closer to home, in Northern Ireland a civil rights movement saw native Irish Catholics take to the streets to end social and employment discrimination and cultural hegemony which favoured the Unionist 'Planters', or Protestant descendants of Cromwell's British army (Purdie, 1990: 133).

<sup>22</sup> Construction was beginning on the new National Theatre building complex on London's South Bank, a building designed by Denys Lasdun in the then controversial Brutalist style. The building was to house the new National Theatre Company, with Laurence Olivier at the helm.

aforementioned legal watershed strongly connected to the Court, the *Theatres' Act of 1968*, which saw the removal of the powers previously invested in the Lord Chamberlain to license plays for performance.

In 1968, the Court was grappling with its own controversy. Gaskill was Artistic Director of the Court. He had endured skirmishes with the Lord Chamberlain on previous occasions, but faced the final battle in this war on censorship when he programmed Bond's *Early Morning* (1968). The Lord Chamberlain refused to even allow the play a club production. For its time, it was a provocative work: Bond's play depicted Queen Victoria in a lesbian relationship with Florence Nightingale. David Gothard, who would later become a stage manager at the Court and then run Riverside Studios, recalls hearing about the play while still a schoolboy: 'How shocking, the thought of Queen Victoria and Florence Nightingale in a lesbian relationship. Remember the Lord Chamberlain runs the Queen's kitchen'.<sup>23</sup> Gaskill programmed a Sunday Night performance regardless, although the production was eventually presented in the afternoon as a 'private dress rehearsal' to an invited audience. A second dress rehearsal followed. Gaskill and the English Stage Company Chairman Alfred Esdaile were questioned by police but no charges ensued. The result was that censorship looked increasingly archaic and impotent and with the *Theatres' Act of 1968*, it came to an effective end. Although the new act still allowed prosecution, it provided for the producer to prove that the content was in the interest of drama, literature or learning (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 111-113). This legislative change signaled a victory for the Court and Gaskill in particular, telegraphing to the public that the Court was still a force of change in contemporary performance and still leading the way for progressive theatre. Bond's *Early Morning* was subsequently given a full production as part of the celebratory Bond season at the Court in 1969 (Whybrow, 2001: ix; Findlater, 1981: 220; Browne, 1975: 110).

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<sup>23</sup> David Gothard unpublished interview with Sue Healy, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Pimlico, London.

The Court's moment at the vanguard of progressive theatre was soon to be challenged by the theatre's tardiness in engaging with alternative theatre which blossomed in Britain in the late 1960s. At this point it is important to consider the term 'alternative theatre'. The new, non-traditional theatre of the era is referred to, often synonymously, as 'alternative', 'fringe', 'agit prop', 'non-mainstream' amongst other labels. The term 'fringe' originated in 1960 at the Edinburgh Festival as a way of identifying irregular performances that were not part of the festival proper. The word became synonymous with the more inclusive category of 'alternative theatre' and thence became an umbrella movement similarly for other forms of theatre including 'agit-prop' which has strong political associations. Although 'fringe' and 'agit-prop' could more accurately describe some of the specific troupes and performances referenced in this study, their use can be problematic. As Megson highlights, 'fringe' implies a binary opposition to the mainstream and might communicate a sense of homogenisation on either side (Megson, 2012: 37). In this thesis, the term 'alternative' is used to describe the rising truant theatre of the era that was broad in character but distinctly anti-traditional and challenged the established theatre, which by now included the Court.

A consideration of the history and associations of alternative theatre is merited at this juncture. Firstly, it is significant that alternative theatre was perceived to have non-British roots. Being alert to the provenance of alternative theatre and its associations aids comprehension of any suspicion there may have been at the Court to this form of performance. The degree of resistance in this specific area will be studied in more depth in Chapter Two. Alternative theatre had links to the visual arts, particularly the Fluxus art movement, an updating of European Dadaism which had blossomed in New York in the 1950s and subsequently bequeathed 'the happening' to the alternative theatre scene and inspired its post-modernist approach. Alternative theatre's workshop-based collaborative processes, strong political leanings and imbrication of performance and visual arts, could also be traced to the European theatre movements and proponents such as Dario Fo. The

first and most influential of the alternative venues established in London was the Arts Lab in Drury Lane set up in 1968 by the American Jim Haynes who had expanded and promoted the Edinburgh Festival Fringe to international attention, along with John Calder and Kenneth Tynan. As Haynes recalls,

Jennie Lee was the Minister for Arts and Theatre at the time, and she asked me to take over the Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre in Holburn. I didn't really want to, but I liked Jenny and found it hard to say no.<sup>24</sup> Jennie got a London producer to put up £2,000 in exchange for the right to have first refusal for any potential West End transfers. We won the Evening Standard Award for the best play in our first season, that was Joe Orton's *Loot*, directed by Charles Marowitz. However, I was not happy with the Cochrane, I had to ask five people's permission to put up a poster and I was never used to doing that. So, I looked around Covent Garden and acquired two warehouses next to each other in Drury Lane. That became the Arts Laboratory.<sup>25</sup>

Haynes' compatriot Ed Berman founded the Ambiance Lunch Hour Theatre Club the same year, which brought new writing to workers on their lunch break. In 1969, the Soho Theatre Company was formed by Fred Pound and Verity Bargate at a venue on Old Compton Street, also housing experimental lunchtime theatre.<sup>26</sup> The success of these venues spawned a number of imitators and, subsequently, black box or studio theatres that provided evening programmes and which were quickly established around the capital. Such venues included The King's Head in 1970, the Bush in 1971 and the Half Moon in 1972. The appearance of *Time Out Magazine* in 1968 facilitated this experimental movement as it allowed unfunded alternative theatre companies to list events without an advertising cost, which in turn enabled theatre-making from outside the main tradition and from more diverse and economically challenged sections of society.<sup>27</sup> Trussler notes that the impact of *Time Out* was recognised by theatres when, strikebound, the publication's absence from newspaper

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<sup>24</sup> Jennie Lee was an artist and a Scottish politician and a Labour MP and Minister for the Arts (1964-1970) in Harold Wilson's government. She was married to Labour leader Aneurin 'Nye' Bevan from 1934 to his death in 1960.

<sup>25</sup> Jim Haynes, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Montparnasse, Paris.

<sup>26</sup> See Morrison, Matthew (2014) *A Critical History of the Soho Theatre: 1968-1975*. Doctoral thesis, University of Westminster. See <http://westminsterresearch.wmin.ac.uk/14712/> [accessed February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018]

<sup>27</sup> There were already a number of theatre magazines in existence, *Theatre Quarterly*, *Plays and Players* and *The Stage*. *Time Out* was to be notably sympathetic to and somewhat aligned with the new movement, whilst *The International Times* had a three-page entertainment section which concentrated on the alternative theatre scene.



stands began to severely affect theatre attendances (Trussler, 1981: xii). The alternative approach to performance was unprecedented and presented a challenge to the erstwhile central position of the literary at theatres such as the Court. Counter culture exponent Haynes cites an example of performance/theatre art during his time:

One of our earliest performances was called *Tea with Miss Gantry*. She was an old woman who lived down Drury lane, up three or four flights of steps. We would have ten to twelve people to her for tea and she'd sit there and tell them her life story, and this was the performance and this was one of our greatest hits.<sup>28</sup>

The Court was slow to embrace alternative theatre. The ambivalence of the Court's triumvirate management towards the new movement should be viewed within the context of the history of the Court and its literary tradition. As Gaskill has stated, Sloane Square viewed itself as a 'writers' theatre'. This quote is drawn from George Devine's declared and specific intention in establishing the Court, that it would be predicated not to be a producer's theatre, nor an actor's theatre, but rather a 'writers' theatre' (Doty, Harbin, 1990: 1; Devine, 2006: 3; Aston, O'Thomas, 2015: 4). The Court therefore very much identified itself as a literary institution. Devine had sought 'hard hitting and uncompromising writers'; the emphasis was always on 'writers'. As Russell Taylor phrases it: '[the founding of the Court] was a gallant high-minded attempt to restore some seriousness to the London stage and restore the writer to his rightful place of honour in the modern theatre' (Russell Taylor, 1971: 8). In a draft article written on the Court's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1966, Bond notes:

The job of a writer born in my life time is, I think, to analyse and explain our society and say what's probably going to happen to us. The Royal Court is one of the few theatres anywhere where this can be done. It is a writers' theatre, and this is the only sort of theatre that could do it.<sup>29</sup>

Contrast this ethos with that of the new alternative movement where the primacy of text was questioned; this form of theatre frequently featured improvisation, devised work and blurred the lines between performance art and theatre. In this light, it is unsurprising that the management at the Court at that period, all of whom had been mentored by Devine, may

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<sup>28</sup> Jim Haynes unpublished interview with Sue Healy, August 4th, 2016, Montparnasse, Paris.

<sup>29</sup> Donald Howarth's personal archive, 9 Lower Mall, London.

have looked askance at a rising movement which did not place the literary tradition, or the writer, centre stage. It would appear therefore that this lack of focus on the writer was at least one of the elements which elicited a resistance at the Court, at least more than any political element in their work, as the emergent 1970s writers have often claimed was the issue. The Court writers of the 1960s were associated with political statement and this aspect of their work had not fazed the management. On the contrary, it appealed and was encouraged. Therefore, if the Court was slow to embrace alternative theatre, it was due, at least in part, to that movement's penchant for dethroning the writer, a figure the Court believed should remain central.

It is necessary to highlight that despite misgivings, the Court management was not as unsupportive of the alternative movement as has been subsequently implied by the young playwrights of the era. In the late 1960s, Open Theatre's *America Hurrah!* by Jean Claude van Italie, directed by Joseph Chaikin (which later become known as *Motel*) appeared at the Sloane Square theatre. An anti-Vietnam War play, it was pivotal to counter culture theatre in New York, and was subsequently greeted warmly by audiences at the Court. Ansorge describes how he was impressed that the company made use of physical expression and striking visual imagery to show 'a kind of tribal existence on the stage' (Ansorge, 1975: 16). It is significant that that particular production inspired Pip Simmons to create a series of frantic, cartoon like representations of American culture and society including *Superman* (1969) and *Do It!* (1971). Nor was the alternative movement entirely excluded by the establishment. By the end of the 1960s, even the Arts Council of Great Britain had officially recognised the contribution made by alternative companies, and allocated £15,000 to a handful of troupes for the 1969-1970 season, a figure which grew annually over the next decade.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> It is also worth noting that *The Come Together Festival* of October 1970 was funded by the New Activities Committee of the Arts Council of Great Britain.

If the alternative scene was not enthusiastically supported by Court management, the movement was intriguing some young British theatre-makers, young playwrights and directors. Max Stafford-Clark, as an example, admits to having been significantly influenced by touring American alternative theatre troupes he encountered in the 1960s, such as Open Theatre and Café La Mama, and was keen to encourage a similar artistic praxis in Britain. Speaking with Philip Roberts in an interview published in 1999, he recalls, ‘The writers played quite a small part in that movement... Suddenly, music and movement seemed a part of what was important, electric and interesting’ (Roberts, 1999: 120). Stafford-Clark later served as Artistic Director at the Court in the 1980s, but had begun his directing career at a key locus for the alternative movement, the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh. He rose to become director of the Traverse Theatre Company Workshop which adopted and advanced many theatre-making approaches that were developed and progressed by the alternative movement, particularly the workshop method. Thus, Stafford-Clark’s interest in alternative theatre pre-dated his association with the Court, which began when he directed Hare’s play *Slag* (1970) in the Theatre Upstairs. The alternative scene also inspired Hare and Bicat to found Portable Theatre, a mobile theatre company that toured several controversial productions, notably including Wilson’s *Blow Job* (1971) and Chris Wilkinson’s *Plays for Rubber Go-Go Girls* (1971). Unusually for alternative theatre, Portable Theatre had a focus on writing which was to set it apart from the more typical alternative theatre companies of the era. It is this more literary focus that kept the young Court writers somewhat at a remove from the core of alternative theatre.

Nonetheless, the young writers associated with the Court were keen to engage with this new form of theatre in some regard and to embrace the theatrical freedoms and opportunities it appeared to offer. Hare recalls the decision to found Portable Theatre, in a 1993 interview with George Gaston:

We thought, wrongly, as it turned out, that England was in a state of apocalyptic crisis. And we didn't believe that contemporary theatre dealt with that crisis. We felt that plays about psychology were simply irrelevant to what we took to be our

country's terminal decline. We had lost faith in its institutions, we thought that Britain's assumption of a non-existent world role was ludicrous, and we also thought that its economic vitality was so sapped that it wouldn't last long. So we wanted to bundle into a van and go round the country performing short, nasty little plays which would alert an otherwise dormant population to this news.<sup>31</sup>

Hare comments on the impetus in the late 1960s to bring theatre out of London, away from the established theatres and into the provinces. Portable Theatre's interaction and engagement with non-traditional theatre audiences accorded with the *modus operandi* of the alternative scene and, in this way, the emergent 1970s writers were aligned with the new alternative movement. Although Portable Theatre did have, as has been previously noted, a more literary approach than alternative troupes of the era, it did embrace new approaches to theatre-making, such as collaborative writing methods, which was also in line with the alternative scene's frequently socialist or at least egalitarian philosophies. As Hare outlines, by exiting London they were able to engage socially and culturally with disengaged or alienated or economically challenged marginalised audiences, which included low income families, laborers and factory workers, ethnic minorities, as well as students and teenagers. This theatre company demonstrated an enthusiasm to perform in non-traditional spaces and their shows frequently presented in loci promising meagre recompense, often workplaces, pubs or even the back of their van (Itzin 1980: xiv; Megson, 2012: 37).<sup>32</sup> Other experimental theatre companies of the era included Foco Novo, founded by Roland Rees with David Aukin and Bernard Pomerance, which also brought theatre to unconventional venues such as miners' welfare and youth clubs, presenting Brecht and Büchner in addition to black playwrights such as Mustapha Matura, Tunde Ikoli and Alfred Fagon. More alternative troupes which comprised largely of British members, emerged in the late 1960s and included: Ken Campbell's Road Show, Pip Simmons Group, Cartoon Archetypical Slogan Theatre, Belt and Braces, the Oval House, The Brighton Combination, and Monstrous Regiment, the latter notable for being an all-female troupe, in a drive to address the gender

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<sup>31</sup> Gaston, G. *Interview: David Hare*, *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (May, 1993), pp. 213.

<sup>32</sup> 1968 was also the year the Ford Transit van was launched and, in its way, played a part in facilitating the mobilisation of alternative theatre, bringing it to the provinces (Bradwell, 2010: 37).

imbalance in British theatre. The Leeds-based political theatre company Red Ladder, endeavored to strengthen relationships with local, working-class and trade union audiences and this was one way the alternative scene became increasingly connected to left-wing politics. Stafford-Clark recalls:

At Joint Stock, we were radicalised by *Fanshen*, the David Hare adaptation of the William Hinton book. The philosophy influenced us. We began to make collective decisions such as should we take bus or the train, and became involved in administration decisions.<sup>33</sup>

As Stafford-Clark suggests, there was a discernible trend on the alternative scene towards socialist and Marxist philosophies and theorists who espoused an egalitarian approach.

Elyse Dodgson, who served as the Court's International Director 1996-2018, encountered a similar ethos when she took a position with Brighton Combination in 1968. Dodgson was paid in food and accommodation, in accordance with communitarian philosophy: 'I did everything, we all did, it was very communal. I acted, cooked, did production work, sat on the front desk and ran some children's workshops.'<sup>34</sup> This tilt towards a communal and democratic approach also embraced those who had grown up at a remove from theatre and the arts. Anyone from any background could become a theatre-maker; anyone could become a visual artist, everyday life could become art. Theatre was opening up for subaltern voices and the alternative scene began to make room for them.

It is crucial to note that with this egalitarian ethos, alternative theatre was also proving to be an accommodating home for identity theatre, or non-white, female, gay and political theatre.<sup>35</sup> For this reason, it is significant for this study that although the Court's

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<sup>33</sup> Max Stafford-Clark, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, March 29<sup>th</sup> 2016, Out of Joint Offices, Finsbury Park, London.

<sup>34</sup> Elyse Dodgson, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Royal Court Theatre, London.

<sup>35</sup> In America, the Civil Rights movement had given rise to a range of plays protesting racism and exploring the African American experience. Of particular note was Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), written and directed by African Americans, and Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* (1964). In Britain, the liberationist politics of the alternative movement conversed with socialist groups and the theatre companies which emerged from this scene in the early 1970s included 7:84, the General Will, Foco Novo and Belt and Braces. In the alternative arena, the subaltern demographic was given due prominence. The London-based American and founder of Inter-Active, Ed Berman, programmed Ed Bullins's *The Electronic Nigger* (1968) at the Ambiance Lunch Hour Theatre, and followed by holding a 'Black and White Power' season at the basement venue in 1970. The Women's Street

emergent white male English playwrights of the 1970s were vocal proponents of many of the novel methods introduced by the alternative movement. They aligned themselves with the alternative movement to an extent that disconcerted some resistant management figures at the Court. As has previously been noted these young Court playwrights were distinct from the alternative movement insofar as they were more literary in their approach. More importantly for this research, there is no evidence that they ever actively sought to include female, non-white or subaltern playwrights among their ranks – in the manner of alternative troupes like Monstrous Regiment, for example. Whether intentional or not, by keeping their form of alternative theatre within the literary fold and maintaining its white, male and English profile, these writers were guarding their privilege, and their privileged position at the Court.

Whilst it is tempting to suggest that the Court was an institution typical of its era in its privileging of the white male English writer, a comparison between the Court and the Theatre Royal Stratford East shows this is not the case. Although often eclipsed by the Court's larger reputation, Stratford East was also promoting new writing throughout the 1950s and on into the 1960s and, importantly, it fostered and championed female, minority and non-British writing including work by Brendan Behan and Shelagh Delaney before the Court. As such, it anticipated these new directions in theatre, specifically identity theatre, which erupted at the end of the 1960s. Situated within the working-class environs of East London, even the theatre's location was in stark contrast to that of the Court in *élite* Sloane Square, Fitzrovia. Stratford East's Artistic Director Joan Littlewood was female, a Communist, banned by the BBC and was under surveillance by MI5.<sup>36</sup> In counterpoint, the Court in this era was run by white middle-class English Oxford-educated males. Stratford

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Theatre Group was founded in 1970 and their theatrical protests included picketing the Miss World Contest in 1971. The group later changed its name to The Punching Judies, later producing *The Amazing Equal Pay Show* (1972). Ed Berman went on to host Women's Theatre 10-week season in 1973, at the Almost Free (the new home of Inter-Active). This celebration of female writing later inspired a 'Homosexual Acts' season in 1974.

<sup>36</sup> See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/mar/04/secondworldwar.past> [accessed February 10th, 2018]

East leaned more towards plays with a broader social appeal, and was demonstrably more focused on theatre that would draw in working-class people, a wider audience and as such it largely avoided criticism of elitism and inaccessibility. Stratford East demonstrates that it was possible for a London theatre with a focus on new writing to have associate writers who were not white, male Englishmen. There was clearly an element at work at the Court that, whether witting or unwitting, was preventing diversity.

#### 1.4 The Court at a critical juncture

Having looked at the broader trends in theatre and at the state of the nation and the state of theatre in general, it is necessary at this point to look at the state of the Court theatre in the late 1960s. As the historian Marwick highlights, the social shifts of the 1960s did not begin in 1968, rather the ‘long sixties’ came about slowly and comprised three sub-periods. Marwick maps this time of change from 1958 to 1974 and claims that there was a continuation and a commonality in the types of changes that were occurring, if not in how they were demanded or effected. These dates are key because Marwick’s time frame roughly equates with key events at the Court. It is useful at this juncture to, briefly, recount the Court’s journey from 1956, the year of the Court’s launch, when Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* nailed the Court’s colours to the mast, through to the tumultuous year of 1968.

According to a widely held narrative which has coalesced around Osborne’s 1956 play, the theatrical landscape which had preceded that play’s premiere comprised of emotionally repressed, escapist dramas set in middle-class drawing-rooms. For this reason, the play and by extension the Court, was credited with ‘revivifying’ contemporary writing in staid, stale, ration-riddled 1950s Britain. It was said to have shattered the ‘French windows’ of British theatre.<sup>37</sup> As the critic Kenneth Tynan

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<sup>37</sup> Glass patio doors, or French windows, were a common metonym in the plays of Rattigan and Coward and other drawing-room comedies of the post-war era.

described, *Look Back in Anger* ‘exploded the glibly codified fairytale world of the country house play – a country fearful of bad taste, obsessed by monarchy and the past’ (Tynan, 2012: 166). The Court had provided Britain with a new form of theatre, or at least the theatre had accelerated a change that Rebellato believes was inevitable (as he sets out in his excellent 1999 study). In the immediate aftermath of *Look Back in Anger*, the Court could claim to be the London theatre most alert to the new theatrical winds and most confident of the way forward. However, *Look Back in Anger* had not had as great an impact on the establishment as the received narrative holds. As *The Guardian*’s theatre critic Michael Billington notes, by the end of the 1950s the old West End power houses remained intact and box office takings reveal the Court had still not achieved a loyal following. The play’s impact, Billington suggests, was initially an aesthetic one with the Court engaging in a sustained war on West End camp and what Billington terms ‘Rococo effeminacy’. The Court did produce exciting directors and actors who also went on to work at the National Theatre and brought their pared-down sensibility with them. In this way, he describes the Court as infiltrating, rather than revolutionising British theatre, and even then only in terms of visual aesthetics (Billington 2007: 119-120).

By 1968, the Court had been in existence for twelve years and was thus at an interesting and critical crossroads on its journey. The Court had never entirely broken with the past following *Look Back in Anger* and the emergence of ‘kitchen sink’ drama.<sup>38</sup> In the years that followed Osborne’s seminal play, an initial and commendable impetus to give a platform to non-white writers and female writers gradually subsided. By the end of the 1960s, there was some evidence that the Court was perceived as a familiar and integral part of the theatrical establishment in Britain.

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<sup>38</sup> The new form of drama said to have been launched by Osborne’s play came to be known as ‘kitchen sink’ which Harrison suggests was a term initially coined as a derogatory phrase (Harrison, 1998 :136).



Although today the Court's website tends to highlight the works of Bond, Wesker, Arden and Storey as the key plays of the 1960s, the Court's programme was also at this time filled with a significant number of classics and revivals. In the 1960s and very early 1970s, the Court's main stage tended towards the intellectual, yet commercially cautious. There were three Shakespearean productions and revisits of works by Coward, Shaw, Congreve, Jonson, Ibsen, D.H. Lawrence, Chekhov and Middleton, which provided balance and funding for the more *avant garde* productions of Beckett, Brecht, Ionesco and also new writing by British writers Bond, Wesker, Simpson and Osborne (Findlater, 1981: 202-222). The Court was also facing increased competition from newly opened theatres across London.

The emergent writers have claimed they left the Court to find more progressive and daring stages that were willing to champion their work. This understanding of events often elides the fact that, if some of their ranks left the Court or if new writers chose not to approach the Court in the early 1970s, the reasons were not simply attributable to the Sloane Square theatre, but to a number of external factors. The National Theatre was a new entity, and this very novelty as well as its national status and its association with theatrical grandees like Olivier and even Tynan, would naturally attract writers regardless of what the Court was programming or not programming. As early as 1966, Gaskill noted the impact of the new competition in a piece he wrote for the Court's 10-year anniversary programme:

In ten years we have seen the establishment of two major repertory theatres in London, the National and the Royal Shakespeare, who present not only the standard classical repertory but also the best continental work and some of the new writers. In presenting Brecht, Pinter and Arden, they have taken away one of the Royal Court's functions and it is clear that, as we cannot hope to match them in spectacle or in the size of the cast we shall have to concentrate on the smaller scale plays.<sup>39</sup>

Here Gaskill is re-examining the Court's own role on the metaphorical stage of Britain. He laments that, if any of the emergent playwrights wished to launch a career-defining work on

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<sup>39</sup> The Royal Court Theatre's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary programme, Donald Howarth's personal archive, 9 Lower Mall, London.

a big stage, one they would like to see on a programme with Pinter or Arden, then it was to the National they would go. Gaskill implicitly provides another understanding of why some of the emergent 1970s playwrights associated with the Court worked elsewhere during this period and why new writers may have approached other venues rather than the Court. The well-funded National was attractive to the young playwrights, potentially elevating their work to bigger and more lucrative stages. Also, as Little and McLaughlin point out in their history of the Court, following the launch of the Theatre Upstairs there had been an eruption of similar spaces across London and across the country which could present new work with little financial investment and therefore reduced risk (Little & McLaughlin, 2007: 122). These reasons combined to mean that other stages were becoming more attractive new writers. It was not entirely a case of squabbling or lack of support at the Court, rather that some writers were understandably lured further afield by offers of more prominent billing and better pay.

### **1.5 The Court responds with the Theatre Upstairs and the *Come Together Festival***

If the Court was tardy and unenthusiastic in its embrace of alternative theatre, there was an attempt to make amends in 1969. Aware that these new directions were making inroads onto the British theatrical landscape, the Court opened a black box studio in its attic space, the first of its kind in England. It was a step seen as an overture to the climate of experimentalism and the emergence of alternative theatre that was blossoming elsewhere in London. This was a sixty-seat theatre, to be managed by Wright. This upper floor area had been run as an informal bar and alternative space for occasional performances after a fire had gutted the space in 1967, and it opened officially as the Theatre Upstairs in February, 1969 (Megson 2012: 73; Roberts, 1999: 127). The existence of the Theatre Upstairs meant that the Court could keep abreast of new trends in theatre-making. Theatre Upstairs Manager Wright, a young white South African who had recently arrived in the UK, looked favourably upon the emergent

writers and on the alternative scene, stating that he supported them.<sup>40</sup> Programme evidence adds ballast to his claim: the space for which Wright was responsible remained a sympathetic arena for alternative work. Wright handed the reins to Roger Croucher in 1971, who ran the space with a similar ethos until August 1972.

Second stage studio theatres such as the Theatre Upstairs were flexible spaces that created opportunities and a destination for new plays. They facilitated innovative ways of making plays and often nurtured projects that drew upon approaches including collaborative methods, digital theatre and verbatim theatre. The success of the Theatre Upstairs signaled a rapid growth of black-box experimental theatres housed as an additional space within traditional venues throughout the country. Publications on the Court have noted that the Court's second stage may have caused a schism, promoted a division or a 'ghettoisation', by siphoning off all the more alternative theatre-making and excluding the same from the main stage. It is this action that first prompted the emerging 1970s playwrights to sense they were being hived off from the Court altogether, and treated as second rate (Roberts in Megson 2012: 73; Little, McLaughlin 2007: 144). The opening of the Theatre Upstairs also came to be seen by some as an empty gesture to the alternative scene, with complaints that it was used as a means of hiding experimental theatre in the attic. The Court's main stage was not designed with alternative theatre in mind, however. Alternative performances tended to need a flexible space that might encourage non-traditional phenomena such as audience participation and arenas wherein the performance space and seating arrangements could change with each specific performance. The Theatre Upstairs was opened in part, in fact, to specifically accommodate these experimental shows. Wright recalls:

We were the first in the country [England] to open a studio theatre and we have Bill Gaskill to thank for that. It was a practical way for a larger organisation to programme new plays, experimental plays, plays that were unlikely to fill a four hundred seat house. It was very obvious that something new was happening in the

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<sup>40</sup> Nicholas Wright, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, May 16th, 2016, Notting Hill, London.

theatre ... well, it was obvious to some of us at the Court. We had about half a dozen very clever and talented individuals about and they richly deserved a stage. They were the people who would make a difference to the theatre as a whole<sup>41</sup>.

Again, here, Wright's comment that it was 'obvious to some of us', suggests a sense amongst the emerging generation that they were privy to new directions in theatre to which the management were not. The alternative scene attracted those who were not necessarily interested in traditional theatre: it was bringing in a new demographic, characterised by Howard Brenton – via Tom Stoppard - as 'denim' (Megson, 2012: 76). This new audience were young, liberal and given to wearing denim to the theatre, rather than the more traditional evening clothes of their parents' generation. The opening of the Theatre Upstairs eventually usurped the relevance of the Sunday night performances without *décor*.<sup>42 43</sup>

Following the establishment of the Theatre Upstairs, the next significant overture to the alternative scene occurred in the autumn of 1970 when the management at the Sloane Square institution invited a number of regional alternative shows to the Court for a festival of alternative theatre. The concept for the *Come Together Festival* was sown when the then Artistic Director Gaskill began a search of 'experimental' or 'exploratory' theatre groups on the fringe, to assess its importance to what he termed 'literary' theatre (Browne 1975: 93-94). Little and McLaughlin refer to the *Come Together Festival* as a playful and provocative attempt by Gaskill to unite both the Upstairs and Downstairs spaces in the Court, and to reflect the flourishing *avant garde*

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<sup>41</sup> Nicholas Wright, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, May 16th, 2016, Notting Hill, London.

<sup>42</sup> In 1957, Devine had implemented the tradition of Sunday night productions without *décor* at the Court. These were plays, 'rehearsed up to dress rehearsal point, but performed with only indications of scenery and costumes' (Findlater, 1981: 42). This approach enabled productions to be mounted at low cost, allowing the showcasing of new, untested writers and directors, without a major financial outlay on the part of the Court. A full scale production might cost £5,000 in the late 1950s, whereas a single without *décor* performance would come to approximately £100. By the 1970s, with the opening of the Theatre Upstairs, the better scripts, or the ones that may have had a future as a Court main production, went upstairs. In this sense, the Sunday night performances became rather a consolation prize, or a means to try out writers about which the Court had reasonable reservations. By the mid 1970s, the Court had stopped the Sunday night performances altogether.

<sup>43</sup> Bolar, Gordon (1984) *Sunday Night Productions Without Decor at the Royal Court Theatre, 1957-1975* (Doctoral Thesis). See [http://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5005&context=gradschool\\_disstheses](http://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5005&context=gradschool_disstheses) [accessed February 10th, 2018]

theatre culture beyond the building (Little & McLaughlin, 2007: 138). *Come Together* showcased alternative work from all around the UK (Bradwell, 2012: 86; Findlater, 1981: 126; Megson 2012: 73,74; Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 138). In addition, *Come Together* provided a chance for the Court to display its ability to recalibrate the theatre with emerging trends relevant to the youth culture. The very name of the festival is taken from the title of a John Lennon penned Beatles' song of the late 1960s.

*Come Together* comprised 20 different shows from the alternative theatre movement that had sprung up throughout the provinces. Amongst the shows listed were a revival of Heathcote William's *AC/DC*, *CAST*, Ken Campbell's *Road Show*, *Pop Concert* and work by N.F. Simpson. The festival took place all over the theatre, which was redecorated for the event, and even spilled out onto Sloane Square. It ran for three weeks until Nov. 9<sup>th</sup>, 1970. During this time, the Court endeavored to position itself at the heart of the alternative scene, or in the parlance of the youth of that period, where theatre was 'at'. At the 1981 Baton Rouge conference, Gaskill describes the energy of the festival:

We ripped the stalls out of the old house, built a new stage, put the audiences at the back... and every fringe group in existence was invited to appear. Stuart Brisley vomited from a scaffolding tower while the National Anthem was played backwards. Peter Dockley's *Foul Fowl* had creatures crawling through foam in hen-coops with live hens miked over the whole building. On their first night *The People Show* threw oranges at the critics and a tethered rabbit upset a pot of paint on the new stage cloth... (Gaskill in Doty, Harbin, 1990: 12)

Seeking publicity for *Come Together*, the Theatre Upstairs Manager, Wright wrote a press briefing in a letter to *Time Out*'s John Ford, who had previously referred to *AC/DC* as 'The first play of the 1970s':

The *AC/DC* throwaway with the woman shaped like a prick bears a lot of copy written by Heathcote; we didn't send it to the straight press, and I can see that it might confuse them.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> A letter dated August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1970, from Theatre Upstairs Manager Nicholas Wright to John Ford, *Time Out* Magazine. The English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/4/1/78).

The informal use of language such as ‘prick’, the conspiratorial reference to other publications as ‘straight’ and the assumption that such publications would be ‘confused’ by alternative antics, demonstrate that the Court was determining to align itself with the alternative, albeit briefly, and locate itself where publications such as *Time Out* were positioned.

The Court further embraced an unconventional approach to marketing the festival. In promotional material, *The People Show* is described with some pride as ‘not comfortable’, the blurb further explaining ‘At times a performance begins in the street or in a shop or a pub nearby, and only reaches the theatre later’.<sup>45</sup> The festival spilled out onto Sloane Square and into the community, including businesses and bars and even telephone boxes. In what was to become a hallmark of this approach to performance, the audience’s comfort and enjoyment of the spectacle was not given priority and onlookers were also considered participants. There was improvisation and no fixed script or shape to many of the participating performances which began ‘at times’ in different places. It was a deeply unconventional event. *Come Together* demonstrates the Court was capable of facilitating alternative theatre and understood its drive to explore untraditional locus and inventive interaction with an audience. In this way, the Court was signaling it’s a validation of the alternative theatre movement. *Time Out* noted that the festival was a ‘striking recognition by a mainstream London theatre of the importance of fringe work’.<sup>46</sup>

The minutes of a Court meeting to discuss the festival publicity reveal the extent of managerial willingness to engage with this alternative approach to theatre-making, at least for this very brief period. One daring suggestion, which would potentially draw critics’ ire, was approved: ‘It was agreed that as well as handouts about the Festival for the critics, it would be nice to have handouts on the critics for the groups’.<sup>47</sup> Having cardboard cut-out

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<sup>45</sup> Publicity material for *Come Together* Festival, Oct. 21<sup>st</sup> – Nov. 9<sup>th</sup>, 1970, The English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/6/1/93).

<sup>46</sup> ‘Court Embraces Fringe’, *Time Out*, Jul. 25<sup>th</sup>, 1970, p. 41, *Time Out* archive, *Time Out* offices, London.

<sup>47</sup> Minutes of meeting of the Artistic Committee, Tuesday, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1970 at which were present: Peter Kuttner, Di Seymour, Bill Bryden, Bill Gaskill, Helen Montagu, Nicholas Wright, John

figures of critics was also mooted, but was not agreed upon. A weird addition to the buffet was floated and dismissed as a step too far: 'Di Seymour's idea of bits of body in jelly was abandoned as too morbid'.<sup>48</sup> There is a sense of fun, of enjoyment of the zaniness the festival offered. The official photographs of the Festival taken by Court photographer John Haynes, and now housed at the English Stage Company archive in Blythe House, demonstrate this playfulness and the pushing of artistic boundaries.

The event was seen as a success. *Time Out's* response to *Come Together* in its 'fringe' supplement was to reiterate its earlier comment that the festival was 'the first time that a major mainstream theatre has recognised the value of the work these groups are doing'.<sup>49</sup> Participating companies were impressed by the Court's accommodation of the alternative scene. In a memo from a Court stage director Bill Bryden to stage manager Peter Wiles, written shortly after the festival, the former comments:

I think you and all the staff should read this quote from David Aukin's letter on behalf of the *People's Show*: 'I want to thank everyone at the Court for the marvellous way they have co-operated with the two companies. It really has been a pleasure to perform there because of the marvellous atmosphere you have created. Regrettably, it is not something which one finds very often in theatre'.<sup>50</sup>

Nonetheless, once the festival was over, it appeared to leave no immediate imprint on theatre-making at the Sloane Square institution: '[Come Together] didn't actually feed anything into the theatre, I don't think it left much trace in the work that followed, [the Court] immediately reverted to being what it has been' (Gaskill quoted in Roberts, 1999: 138). At the Baton Rouge conference, he further ruminated on his ambivalence to the movement:

During my operation of the Court, I think we had become conservative, I mean, myself, Lindsay Anderson and Anthony Page, who were running the theatre. Perhaps we weren't altogether in sympathy with the new movement. I was very ambivalent. (Doty, Harbin, 1990: 166)

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Simpson and Gloria Taylor, The English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/4/23/31).

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> 'Groups Groped', *Time Out*, October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1970, 60-67.

<sup>50</sup> The English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, *Come Together Festival* folder, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/6/1).

He later conceded that this overture to the alternative scene was in part an attempt to consider its importance to what Gaskill termed 'literary' theatre (Browne 1975: 93-94). It is also telling to note the language used in the *Time Out* article: by referring to the Court as a 'mainstream' theatre, *Time Out* was highlighting that this alternative magazine did not view the Sloane Square theatre as non-establishment, regardless of the gesture and the Court's own temporary perception of itself.<sup>51</sup> Gaskill himself later commented that, 'The Royal Court was always a mainstream theatre, not a fringe theatre, but a theatre in which the best new plays could be done as well as possible. We always thought we were the main tradition' (Itzin, 1980: 226). The Court viewed itself as sufficiently establishment to invite the Prince of Wales to its charity preview of *Uncle Vanya* that same year.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps because of this underlying attitude, these hidden dynamics, the festival retreated in the rear view mirror and the Court's main stage largely reverted to hosting work of the literary tradition.

That the festival occurred at all demonstrates that by the very early 1970s the Court was alert to the new directions in theatre-making, even if alternative theatre was not invited to form a significant part of the Court's programme in the festival's immediate aftermath. *Come Together* may have been a half-hearted gesture, a flirtation more than a commitment. Nonetheless, that the festival was programmed at all negates, to some extent, the accusation that the Court's management was stubbornly resisting new trends in theatre. At this stage, it is useful to note therefore that Gaskill, along with Hare, David Aukin and Stafford-Clark, later formed Joint Stock Theatre Company in 1974, which toured the country in a van and utilised many of the new approaches to theatre-making that had emerged on the alternative scene. Therefore, an accusation that the management was belligerently opposed to either alternative theatre or the emergent playwrights is unfounded. As Wright recalls:

Bill [Gaskill] was the most fascinating man. He was utterly unpredictable, sometimes generous and warm and at other times cold and hurtful. He would approach everything with an initial burst of enthusiasm, and then get bored and back-track. *The Come Together Festival* was characteristic of his boldness and

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<sup>51</sup> In its reply to Lois Sieff dated Dec. 11<sup>th</sup>, 1969, Buckingham Palace declines the invitation stating 'His Royal Highness... is not accepting any engagements during the term next year, so that he can study hard for his final exams in the summer.' Donald Howarth's personal archive, Hammersmith.



imagination. When Tony Richardson asked him, sarcastically, which act in that festival he had been most proud of, Bill answered ‘all of them.’ You have to admire his gutsiness in saying that. Bill recognised that there was a young movement working towards a new kind of theatre, new music and that the Royal Court had to be involved in it. It had a big impact on the Royal Court in the long term.<sup>52</sup>

It is likely fair to surmise that Gaskill may not have found the alternative movement inspiring, or was he particularly keen to embrace it, but he did recognise its importance and had attempted to become acquainted with it.

It is unfair to claim the triumvirate management at the Court did not support alternative theatre at this time; they did engage with this new movement, albeit half-heartedly and inconsistently. The Court’s issue with alternative theatre would appear to be, at least in part, because Court management considered the theatre primarily a literary institution and found somewhat unpalatable the fact the alternative movement did not recognise the primacy of the writer. There was also the question of alternative theatre’s non-British roots, a point which will be looked at more closely in Chapter Two. The emerging Court writers of the era liked to align themselves with alternative theatre as they saw it as modern and the way forward, and complained that by failing to champion their work, the Court’s management was not moving with the times. The Court did support their plays to a degree, however, even if Sloane Square’s response to their work was often tepid. The young writers’ association with the alternative movement possibly did concern the Court’s management. It is crucial to bear in mind that, ironically, the young writers were, in fact, too literary in approach to be really considered truly alternative. Moreover, and most significantly for this study, this group of young writers would have been an anomaly in the more diverse world of alternative theatre; they were all white, male Englishmen – a trait which they had in common with the Court management. If the Court of this period was falling out of step with trends in theatre in a significant way, it was not because Sloane Square was reluctant to embrace alternative theatre; it was because the Court, like the young

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<sup>52</sup> Nicholas Wright, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, May 16th, 2016, Notting Hill, London.

playwrights, was failing to provide a significant platform to those beyond their own demographic – the white English male.

### **1.6 A consideration of ‘humanist’ plays programmed at the Court in this era**

The young writers of the late 1960s and early 1970s have repeatedly claimed that their work was neglected by the Court during the triumvirate period, particularly in comparison to the support provided for their predecessor generation in the early-to-mid 1960s (Roberts, 1999:129; Findlater 1981: 139; Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 121). These young playwrights tend to blame this perceived lack of championing on their work being too ‘political’ in approach, in comparison to what they have consistently termed the ‘humanist’ plays of the 1960s, which these playwrights felt sat in opposition to the political impulses of their new movement (Hare in Findlater, 1981: 142). In order to interrogate their claim in a manner that has not been done previously in scholarship, it is essential to assess, contrast and compare the work they termed ‘humanist’ and their own work, which they refer to as ‘political’. Such an examination is necessary to determine if these labels are merited, and to establish to what extent there was a genuine discrepancy between the level of support given to the young writers and that enjoyed by their predecessors at the Court. It is also useful to hold in comparison the literary approach and artistic praxis of the Court writers of the 1960s with that of the emergent playwrights of the 1970s, to better understand their interpretation of ‘humanist’ and ‘political’ theatre.

In the ten years that followed Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*’s debut, the Court had seen the emergence of the so-called ‘kitchen sink’ playwrights including Bond, Wesker, John Arden and David Storey. They came to the fore of the Court’s programme and by extension to the vanguard of new playwriting in Britain. Today their plays are vaunted as key works of the 1960s and include landmarks of post-war British Theatre such as Wesker’s *Roots* (1958), Storey’s *This Sporting Life* (1963) and Bond’s *Saved* (1965) (Findlater, 1981: 110-115; Little & McLaughlin, 2007: 105; Whybrow, 2001: 1-4). Wesker, Bond and Storey

are particularly significant in this research as their work reflects how the first wave of playwrights from the ‘long sixties’ were responding to the social shifts which had begun in the late 1950s. As has been established, in the received narrative, discourse on tensions at the Court during the 1968-1975 period tends to involve frequent tangential conversations pointing to a political/humanist divide pertaining to approaches to theatre making. To challenge this understanding, in this section, I particularly map the political content inherent in the plays of Wesker, Bond and Storey and explore the extent to which personal experience of the communities about which they write informs their work. In order to comprehend the genre of work the Court was championing beyond these named writers, I further reflect on the work of Donald Howarth, a Court writer who emerged in the late 1950s, whose work spanned the 1960s at the Court and whose most commercially successful play, *Three Months Gone*, was premiered at the Court in 1970.

Storey and Wesker were two of the Court’s most important writers in the 1960s. It is their work specifically that the rising generation of Court writers such as Hare and Edgar consistently cite when describing the ‘humanist’ work the Court. It is helpful, therefore, to consider plays by Wesker and Storey that were programmed at the Court, to determine if it is accurate to refer to their work as ‘humanist’. Storey’s *In Celebration* (1969) concerns the homecoming of three brothers, Andrew, Steven and Colin Shaw – a solicitor/artist, teacher/writer, and union negotiator, respectively – returning to their Northern mining home town to take their working-class parents to the best local hotel for a fortieth wedding anniversary dinner. A number of upsetting and difficult past episodes soon come to the surface, including the death of a brother, a suggestion of another’s homosexuality and their mother’s attempted suicide. Despite the tension, the family do come together briefly and possibly for a final time. The play is an exploration and a portrayal of contemporary working-class Northerners. It explores how this demographic, and particularly its family unit, was faring against the significant contemporary social shifts of the era. Women’s issues are examined via the figure of the mother, once a promising student with a bright

future whose gender and a pregnancy put paid to ambition and landed her in an early marriage to a miner of lower social status. The play further explores how education was, to a certain extent, distancing a younger generation from their working-class parents. An element of autobiography can be mapped in *In Celebration* – Storey was the son of a Yorkshire coal miner and he had attended art school before becoming a writer. This play, with its focus on relationships, human inter-dependence and the dynamics of family, is underpinned with left-leaning political themes and social commentary. *In Celebration* is a strongly human play, but it is also, in an understated subtextual way, a political play.

In a similar vein, Wesker's celebrated Court trilogy *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1956), *Roots* (1958) and *I'm Talking about Jerusalem* (1960) pivot on themes including self-discovery and love, confronting death and political disillusion. Like Storey's *In Celebration*, Wesker's trilogy presents its themes via the prism of family. The first of the three plays, *Chicken Soup with Barley*, examines the disintegration of the East-End Jewish Kahn family, mirrored by son Ronnie's loss of faith in Communism. Taking place over a 20-year period, the play begins in 1936 with the Battle of Cable Street where working-class Jews stand up to Mosley's blackshirts. After the war, Sarah Kahn attempts to hold her family together when her husband has a stroke and her daughter leaves for rural England disillusioned by industrial society. In 1956, Sarah Kahn's left-wing idealism is challenged by the Soviet invasion of Hungary, leaving Sarah isolated. Viewed through this lens of the family unit, the play ponders an urgent political question – to what extent should the left unite and support the oppression of the Hungarian revolution, if at all. Simultaneously, the play considers the journey of working-class London Jews in the mid-twentieth century. It is the family setting which has resulted in his work being labelled 'humanist', as if a family play could not be 'political'.

*Roots*, in contrast, is set in rural Norfolk and written in the distinctive East Anglian dialect. This play centers on the uneducated Beattie and her journey into independence and

awakening. The play begins with her repeating the words and opinions of her unseen city boyfriend Ronnie. Caught between two worlds, she consistently quotes Ronnie in an unnatural, paratactic way: ““You can’t learn to live overnight. I don’t even know,” he say, “and half the world don’t know but we got to try. Try,” he say” (Wesker, 2008: 53). The play follows Beattie towards her eventual autonomy and her ultimate appreciation of her rural working-class roots. Beattie’s arrival at her destination is heralded when a ‘Dear John’ letter arrives from Ronnie. After initial heartbreak, Beattie’s voice sheds its paratactic style and her own authentic voice breaks through. Beattie comes to realise that she does not have to be dictated to and led by a man. *Roots* can be read as a feminist play, viewed through the soft meniscus of a rural Norfolk setting.

The final play in Wesker’s trilogy, set in the post war years of 1946-1959, *I’m Talking About Jerusalem*, connects both the worlds of East End London and rural Norfolk. Sarah Kahn’s daughter, Ada, marries Dave Simmonds and the pair reject industrial society and move to the country in an attempt to live the ‘good life’, and experience the *Kibbutz* ethos in rural England. They find themselves much challenged by the countryside and rural life. Friends’ visits map their progress over their dozen years in their rural home. These visitors chart, chide and comment on the fortunes of Ada and Dave’s experiment. The play culminates in the couple’s realisation that their project has failed. Nonetheless, Dave and Ada are ultimately gratified that they have at least tried. To an extent it is Ada this time who is the driving voice behind Dave, as the absent Ronnie was similarly to Beattie in *Roots*. Ada delivers the political inspiration and the mantras and the political ideology of the commune, of the kibbutz approach. In *I’m Talking About Jerusalem*, Ada’s didactic mantras, the play’s political message, the over-arching theme of the trilogy, are all reinforced. It is a work with a focus on human relationships but with an under-riding political commentary.

This trilogy essentially mirrors the journey of Wesker’s generation of London East-End Jewry, a demographic associated with socialism, particularly in the wake of the Holocaust and what fascism had visited upon Jews. Like Storey, Wesker draws strongly on

auto-biography, using three interconnected Jewish families to consider how left-wing politics within the Jewish sphere had been informed and influenced by major international events from the 1930s through to the 1960s. Wesker had been raised by committed Communists whose own belief system was challenged by Stalinism and the Soviet invasions of both Hungary in 1956, and later Prague in 1968. Thus, as a politically aware Jew of Eastern European descent, these political questions were familiar territory to Wesker. He focused on the social impact of these political shifts rather than present the politics directly. With these plays he presents a political narrative delivered using the dynamics of a family. It is salutary to note that Wesker also, unusually for the time, explored these questions via female characters Sarah, Beattie and Ada respectively.

Wesker and Storey's contemporary Bond was the more experimental, provocative, oppositional and confrontational writer at the Court in the 1960s. At that time, Bond penned plays that were fiercely preoccupied with the violence inherent in society. He was the least socio-economically advantaged of this trio of 1960s Court playwrights, the one who had experienced the most hardships. Bond had left school at fifteen and had encountered social alienation ever since, which is a theme in his work. When the Lord Chamberlain's censorship notes were presented to him, he equated the edits with seeing his work incarcerated: '[There were] lines and sections ruled out in light blue pencil. The lines reminded me of prison bars: through them I could see the text of my play – freedom. It was a small example of state violence' (Bond in Whybrow, 2001: 309). Like Wesker and Storey, however, Bond's play *Saved* (1965) pivots on a family axis and, again, regards social disenfranchisement, cultural poverty and the frustrations of the lower classes. Most notoriously, *Saved* explores the presence and intensity of violence in contemporary society via a scene where a baby is stoned to death in its pram. *Saved* appears to posit that society is unjust and that all are complicit in this injustice. It is a play designed to discomfort the audience and provoke them into reconsidering their world and their place in it. In its determination to shock, this work nudges theatre towards the overt, direct provocations of alternative theatre.

Bond, Wesker and Storey wrote about working-class worlds with which they were personally acquainted and of which they had been part. They documented how those lower down the socio-economic scale were being affected by the social and legal changes that occurred in the 1960s. Their characters were inspired by their own experiences, their upbringing and family life. In this way, their personal experiences translated into plays infused with a strong left-leaning political subtext.

The first writer to have work programmed at the Court by the triumvirate when Gaskill took his sabbatical was Howarth, a playwright who had been associated with the Court since the late 1950s. His comedy, *Three Months Gone* (1970), is an example of how a playwright was personally liberated following the legal reforms of the late 1960s, in this case with regard to the *Sexual Offences Act* (1967) as well as benefitting from the *Theatres Act*. Howarth's earlier plays, including his Court debut *Sugar in the Morning* (1959), had homosexual storylines that for legal reasons were either suppressed and/or misrepresented, much to Howarth's chagrin.<sup>53</sup> In one instance, a suggestion of homosexuality was replaced with a 'more acceptable' incest storyline. In the instance of *Three Months Gone*, the final work in his Alvin Hanker trilogy, the play was written after the amendment to the law in 1967, and Howarth was free to present a male character's desire for the sailor brother of his girlfriend. The legal reforms had therefore directly liberated Howarth to write openly about a community of which he was a part. Interestingly, the then Artistic Director Gaskill had not wanted to stage the play at the Court but when he went on sabbatical in 1969 and Anderson, unaware or unperturbed by Gaskill's objections, programmed the play for January 1970. The first month of the year is challenging in terms of attracting an audience but Howarth's play, which featured the actors Diana Dors and Jill Bennett, proved popular, had a very successful run at the Court and transferred to the Duchess Theatre in the West End. In her March 14<sup>th</sup> review for *The Spectator*, Hilary Spurling called the play an 'agreeably

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<sup>53</sup> *Sugar in the Morning* was not the original title of Howarth's play. Initially named *Lady on the Barometer*, it was changed by Gaskill as 'Lady' referred to the male lead character Kendrick and was therefore considered too overt an implication that Kendrick was a homosexual.

unassuming, old-fashioned, sentimental comedy'. She mentions but does not dwell upon the main character's homosexuality and appears entirely unfazed by the homosexual content.<sup>54</sup> Attitudes had changed markedly.

At this stage in his career, Howarth's work does not have the discernable political subtext of his contemporaries Wesker, Bond and Arden. Yet in the early 1970s, a homosexual playwright writing plays which referred to homosexuality was a political statement in itself. Howarth's play was admired by the management, as Anderson recalls in Little and McLaughlin:

One of the theatre's greatest successes is Donald Howarth's comedy *Three Months Gone* (1970) whose range extends from the most delicate shade of relationship to brilliant verbal patterning and riotously broad comedy. (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 130)

*Three Months Gone* also demonstrates that the Court's reputation as a brooding, contemplative and overly intellectual institution is not wholly deserved. Howarth's play reveals that the Court was capable of producing successful commercial, albeit cleverer-than-average, comedy.

Notwithstanding Howarth's sexuality, Wesker's Jewishness or the non-public school or Oxbridge provenance of Bond and Storey, these playwrights were, nevertheless, all white, male and English, traits they shared with the emerging playwrights of the 1970s.<sup>55</sup> The playwrights of the 1960s were aligned, to varying degrees, with the orthodoxies and praxis of traditional theatre in that they wrote plays designed to be performed on a proscenium arch stage to a conventional theatre going audience and their work employs a broadly classical dramatic structure. The stories are communicated via a focus on family, for

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<sup>54</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, it is interesting to note that in the same review column, Spurling also writes about Brenton's *Heads* and *The Education of Skinny Spew* (1970) playing at Ed Berman's alternative Ambiance Lunch Time Theatre. Having viewed Howarth's Royal Court transfer at the Duchess Theatre, Spurling notes: 'It is something of a relief to turn to the Ambiance, where the standards of acting and direction are as fastidious, and the choice of plays rather less conservative, than at the Royal Court'. Spurling's comment is a revealing example of how, by 1970, the Court was increasingly seen as part of the conservative establishment.

<sup>55</sup> The term 'public school' is used in this study in accordance with the British meaning: an independent, private school for which parents have to pay. Public schools are often, but not always, boarding schools.



the most part, and a consideration of human relationships and dynamics. It is, presumably, this latter aspect that has prompted the label ‘humanist’. There are political themes and questions underpinning these plays. That the Court was steadfast in its support for these playwrights during the 1960s, indicates that the Court was not adverse to championing plays with a political message.

### **1.7 A consideration of work by ‘political’ playwrights programmed at the Court**

As has been established, despite their later claims to the contrary, the emergent 1970s playwrights were indeed programmed at the Court throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, straddling the two distinct periods of the triumvirate (1969-1972) and Lewenstein’s tenure (1972-1975). Their work was largely, but not exclusively, housed in the Theatre Upstairs, though there were some instances of transfer to the Theatre Downstairs after a successful run, such as with Heathcote Williams’ *AC/DC* (1970) and Brenton’s *Magnificence* (1973). It is beneficial at this point, therefore, to look more closely at some of their work at the Court, to better understand why these younger writers self-declared their plays as ‘political’. It is imperative for this study to determine if, and in what ways, their work was a departure from that of their predecessors. Their specific location within the theatre ecology is also established here.

These younger playwrights viewed themselves as political theatre-makers inhabiting more literary quarters of the alternative landscape. They claim their plays gave importance to political questions that were in urgent public discourse at that time. A number of the younger writers, such as Hare, have said on record that they were uninterested in introspective discussions about ‘aesthetics’, considering instead that the political message of their plays was paramount (Megson, 2012: 135). Hare remarked some time later, ‘The political and social crisis in England in 1969 [was] so grave that I had no patience for the question of how well written a play was, how it related to the outside world’ (Doty, Harbin, 1990: 11). Hare implies here that his predecessors at the Court were more concerned with artistic approach than the political point of their work. It should be noted that these

emergent playwrights tended to write scripts, albeit sometimes collaboratively, rather than rely on improvisation or employing direct interaction with the audience. This literary approach was in contrast to the praxis found on the alternative scene where work tended to contain strong elements of performance art, pranks, ‘offending the audience’ techniques and regularly had a focus on improvisation and physicality rather than text *per se*. The more literary approach of the emergent 1970s playwrights ironically meant their work had more in common with the Court writing of the 1960s, than it did with the performance art of the alternative scene.

At this juncture, it is useful to recognise that this group of young writers was a very diverse cohort. They have bequeathed Court history with the narrative of the 1960s ‘humanist’ and 1970s ‘political’ binary. In exploring their work, however, it is clear that these young playwrights were quite individual in style and it is problematic to label them all as ‘political’, at least in the same sense. They had strikingly different dramatic approaches, interests and foci and it is therefore impossible to select a play that represents a single approach, or even a selection that showcase strong common traits. I have opted instead to explore plays that represent their work at the Court during this period which has garnered the most attention.

It is useful to consider Hare’s 1970 breakthrough play *Slag* (1970), to assess the extent to which it could be accurately labelled ‘political’ rather than ‘humanist’. *Slag* can be read as a satire on contemporary feminism, inspired somewhat by the Greek drama *Lysistrata*, but more closely related to Shakespeare’s *Love Labour’s Lost*, with the women forswearing sex, rather than the men. The play was reportedly written in three days in the back of a Ford Transit van while Hare was on tour in the late 1960s with Portable Theatre, the alternative theatre company he had co-founded with Tony Bicat. Initially produced by Portable at the Hampstead Theatre in April, 1970, *Slag* was later staged in a fresh production in the Court’s Theatre Upstairs in May, 1971. A success at the Court, it is still considered one of Hare’s best plays (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 141). *Slag* later won Hare the Evening Standard Award for the Most Promising Playwright.

Hare's debut at the Court is not recalled fondly by the playwright. He claims a 'despairing' Gaskill announced: 'Well, I suppose we're going to have to put your play on' (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 139). Whatever Gaskill's feelings were about the play, he programmed it nonetheless. Co-Artistic Director Page recalls, 'I loved *Slag*. It had such an incredibly individual atmosphere. Just three women in a school. I thought it was very theatrical and very haunting. Much more surreal than anything he has written since' (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 141). It is likely that Hare felt aggrieved that he had had to use his own theatre company to produce the play in the first instance, before it piqued interest at the Court. When the Court did stage *Slag*, they insisted on a new production of the play, featuring the crowd-pulling actors Anna Massey, Lynn Redgrave and Barbara Ferris. The Court production was directed by Stafford-Clark in his debut at Sloane Square.

*Slag* features three rather unstable female characters, a promiscuous woman, a man-hating woman and a woman who represents the more traditional maternal, nurturing female role. The three are teachers at a girls' school Brackenhurst, and they take a vow of celibacy in the name of revolution against patriarchy. Joanne is a militant feminist and a Marxist film critic with a penchant for vulgarities such as 'cunt', 'wank' and 'fuck', which at the time had strong shock and comic value when voiced by a female character. Hare presents Joanne as both a rebel and somewhat ridiculous. Her lines are the most humorous: recalling her failed suicide attempt she states, 'You've heard of haemophiliacs, well I'm a haemophobiatic. I couldn't keep the wretched stuff flowing' (Hare, 1971: 70). The characters bicker, debate women's liberation and feminism, engage in power games, false pregnancies and murder attempts, while the school haemorrhages pupil after pupil until there are none left and the teachers are forced to disband. It is a somewhat surreal play and its commercial success suggests it had strong appeal at that time. This play was written in the era of growing awareness of gender issues and rising focus on women's rights. With hindsight, however, *Slag*'s tone appears somewhat glib and dismissive of women's issues, and to an extent, modern sensibilities can understand the play as mocking the feminist movement.

The character of Ann, who heads the school, is a rather patrician figure. Her letters to

her mother reveal her denial over the true state of affairs at the school which she appears incapable of managing. This is a situation that can be viewed as a metaphor for the establishment's denial regarding the decline of empire. Elise meanwhile knits for her unborn child, eventually revealed as a false pregnancy which disappears in flatulence. This trope itself, though clearly designed for comedy, feels a male punchline on pregnancy. Hare's lack of familiarity with womanhood is also evident in the dialogue, which is pared to the bone. The playwright appears aware of this failing, as one character rather knowingly comments, 'This is not the way women speak together, it's not the way they live. It doesn't ring true' (Hare, 1971: 74). It is a line that insulates the playwright from anticipated criticism of his lack of familiarity with female conversation. Most revealingly, and perhaps unwittingly, the play displays Hare's norm as one of heterosexual harmony. *Slag* suggests that, to Hare, a female-only existence is an unpleasant state for the women. For this reason, it is easy to see how this play could be offensive to women, particularly women who were part of the growing feminist movements which he satirises.

In 1975, faced with some criticism and accusations of the misogyny in regard to this play, Hare claimed that the play was not a comment on feminism but on institutions:

The point is that it's really a play about institutions, not about women at all. Only that I thought it was delightful to see three women on the stage. It's about every institution I had known – school, Cambridge, Pathé, and so on. They are all the same. That is how institutions perpetuate themselves. With rituals that go on inside them – ever more baroque discussions about ever dwindling subjects. (Trussler, 1981: 112, Zeifman, 1994: 24)

The understanding that the play explores the dynamics and habitus of institutions is endorsed by Megson who compares it to *If...*, the 1968 film directed by Lindsay Anderson set in a boys' boarding school and which regards the culture and conventions of that particular microcosm and maps the boys' journey towards insurrection. Megson notes *Slag*'s 'evocation of England, rendered metonymically through its institutions, as turgid, life denying, worn out' (Megson, 2012: 127).

*Slag*'s exploration of the social ecology and dynamics of institutions is of particular interest here as this thesis regards the specific institutional architecture of the Court and it is

significant that Hare was preoccupied with the workings of institutions at this time. With the political climate in 1970 providing an unprecedented focus on feminism, the recent legal reforms that were affecting women, combined with the strengthening of women's rights in this era, the play is clearly also inspired by the feminist movement, Hare's denials notwithstanding. Women's liberation was an urgent topic in 1969 and the subject would have naturally appealed to a politically-aware playwright seeking a contemporary theme which chimed well with the political impetus of the alternative movement. Having written the play within a matter of days in the back of a van, surrounded by men, it is unlikely that Hare carried out any great research into the experiences of women living in all-female worlds, and he has admitted this was the case (Megson, 2012: 126). This play displays a striking lack of understanding of the dynamics of female interaction and any real knowledge of an all-female existence. It is revealing to note Hare's ambiguous choice of words even when he defends his decision to write an all-female play: Hare states he did so because he believed it would be 'delightful to see three women on a stage'. This is a comment which approaches the patronising as it appears to prioritise the visual appeal of women. The play presents feminism from a male perspective and can be interpreted as scornful of the nascent movement. Wandor accuses Hare of stoking media hostility with the 'montage of frigid, authoritarian, petty, man-hating nymphomania'.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, a play on feminism and feminists written by a man and from a male perspective locates *Slag* at some distance from the alternative scene where there was a growing tendency to provide a direct platform for works by minorities and female writers to present their own stories. It is of note that the Court management were not perturbed by the lack of female involvement in the scripting of the play and no mention of Hare's qualification to write on behalf of women was ever raised, despite other criticisms reportedly levelled at the play by Court management. It is also difficult to understand how Hare could describe himself as a 'political' playwright with this play, as his specific political point is unclear, even oblique.

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<sup>56</sup> Wandor, M. (1986 [1981]) *Carry On, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* revised edition (Megson, 2012: 128).

Snoo Wilson is another prominent member of the group of Court writers during this period. He had been an associate of Hare since the late 1960s. Wilson wrote plays that are indicative of the playfulness and whimsy that is often associated with the alternative movement. Examples of this work include *Pignight* (1971) and *Blow-Job* (1971), where horror and farce sit side by side. Wilson contributed to the group-authored Court plays *Lay By* (1970) and *England's Ireland* (1970).<sup>57</sup> His play *The Pleasure Principle* (1973), a title borrowed from the works of Freud, showed at the Theatre Upstairs during Lewenstein's tenure and was directed by Hare, again allegedly to Anderson's chagrin. This play was Wilson's first sole effort at the Court and it exhibited what became the writer's hallmark surrealism including the appearance of a dancing gorilla, or rather an actor in a suit. Wilson's play also featured a live goat, Betty, who lived at Hare's throughout the run.<sup>58</sup>

The *Pleasure Principle* opens with the IRA blowing up a Wimpy Bar. As Wilson recalls:

I have a memory of Neil Fitzwilliam in a spotlight as Edith Piaf, rising out of a barrel and miming, '*Non, je ne regrette rien*,' cued by Ann Firbank flatly reading out a bomb warning. It still makes me laugh.' (Little, McLaughlin, 2007:167)

Wilson's last sentence goes some way towards revealing the difficulty of writers whose own experiences are significantly removed from the scenarios they present in their writing, in this case the reality of the 'Troubles'. Wilson's quote suggests that he finds humour in the bombing, that to him this is an amusing and bizarre event. It is an occurrence of which he had no experience, and nor had his director. Wilson appears oblivious to the fact such commentary could be deemed offensive to those directly affected by the 'Troubles'.

Both Wilson and Hare have subsequently stated that the play was improved and

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<sup>57</sup> *England's Ireland* (1970) was a collaborative piece, written over the course of a week in a rural Welsh cottage, by Hare, Edgar, Brenton, Griffiths, Clark, Fuchs and Bicat. The play explores the working-class Irish and Catholic life in the urban streetscapes of Belfast and Derry at the height of the 'Troubles'. It is an example of this group of emergent white male English writers choosing to write a topic of which they had no personal connection or experience and for which they made no apparent effort to include an Irish writer in this writing process. Notable also, the one female invited to the cottage for the week was there to work as a secretary.

<sup>58</sup> Animals on stage were a common feature on the alternative scene. Animal rights had not yet been brought to prominence in public debate. It is salutary to note that, in 2017, the Court's programme featured on its mainstage *Goats* (2017) a Syrian play by Liwaa Yazji which also featured live goats.

informed by Hare's direction, that he sculpted it into a more presentable and commercial comedy (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 167). *The Pleasure Principle* is deemed 'political' presumably because it explores political themes that were current in public discourse at the time. Its themes are broad and it specifically alludes to corporate greed and the nature of love in a capitalist society. In comparison to *Slag*, it is more typical impulses of an alternative play, *The Pleasure Principle* is determined to provoke and shock the audience. Whatever its political intent, its surreal and whimsical treatment of a bombing campaign from the era of the Troubles is unsettling. It could be described as a possibly naïve approach, even an offensive one, for an English writer entirely inexperienced with or unconnected to the violence that had recently erupted in Ireland. It was this naivety that some members of the Court management, particularly Lewenstein, found unpalatable and even irritating, as will be considered in more detail in Chapter Three.

Wilson's play starred Brenda Fricker, Dinsdale Landen and Julie Covington, and was a success. Nonetheless, Hare retrospectively felt that he had let Wilson down by 'defanging' the play, to make it more appealing to a wider audience. Wilson disagreed, claiming in Little and McLaughlin that he had written it as a play for the West End and thus was intended as a commercial piece. Wilson further commented that he had not realised that there was tension between how he saw the world and the way people who went to see major commercial shows on Shaftesbury Avenue saw the world (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 167). It is this blend of charm, surrealism, naivety and rebellion which came to distinguish Wilson's work.

*Magnificence* (1973) by Brenton is described by the author as a tragedy which dwells on the political scene of the early 1970s, a time of disillusionment (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 164). Like Hare's *Slag*, Brenton's play was directed by Stafford-Clark, it starred Pete Postlethwaite, Kenneth Cranham, Michael Kitchen and Robert Eddison. It is the most overtly political of these three plays examined here. Not only did *Magnificence* show on the main stage in the Theatre Downstairs, programmed by Lewenstein, but it was a commissioned play and staged when Brenton was resident dramatist at the Court. Brenton

had been a colleague of Hare's since the late 1960s, a connection which resulted in his joining Portable Theatre. He later went to Amsterdam and became intimately acquainted with the type of student squat revolutionaries who inspire *Magnificence*. It is in this one significant regard that *Magnificence* is somewhat anomalous for a play by a young Court playwright, as here Brenton writes on a subject of which he has had first-hand experience. In *Magnificence*, Brenton homes in on the sinister aspects that were creeping into the idealism of the late 1960s, as demonstrated by the activities of militant organisations exemplified in Britain by the Angry Brigade:

They were decent, perfectly bright students who decided to blow up the Ministry of Defence and then went to jail. It was a tragedy of waste, really, and that became a play.<sup>59</sup>

The play is about young radicals. Whilst living in communes, Brenton had witnessed the withering of his youthful idealism and had come to question the impact of these groups, their ethos and *modus operandi*:

There was a horrible psychodrama developing on the left at that time: middle-class Maoists telling you you're impure, bourgeois, because you won't go and kill someone. Horrible, but understandable.<sup>60</sup>

It is enlightening to put these comments in their historical context. Following the end of the second world war and the election of a Labour government, there had been much expectation particularly in regard to the nationalisation of industry and the creation of the welfare state. This was soon followed by disillusionment, particularly amongst those who had profited from the Education Act and were educated out of the working class. The full revolution did not come to pass, neither in theatre nor in wider society. It was that vacuum of disillusionment that the events of 1968 began to fill (Itzin, 1980: 6). *Magnificence* investigates that specific disillusionment in the post-1968 society. Brenton recalls the period as having begun in a burst of utopian feeling with the sense that a revolution was imminent.

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<sup>59</sup> Interviewed by Andrew Dickson for *The Guardian*, July 10th, 2010. See <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jul/10/howard-brenton-life-in-theatre> [accessed February 10th, 2018]

<sup>60</sup> *ibid*



It never came; instead there was decay and psychodrama and a thrust towards violence, which eventually manifested in violent splinter groups such as the Baader-Meinhof faction in Germany and later the Red Brigades in Italy (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 164):

I loathe us, I loathe our stupid puerile view of the World ... That WE have only to do it, that WE have only to go puff, and the monster buildings will go splat... (Brenton, [1970] 1983: 67)

Set in London in the early 1970s, *Magnificence* explores social issues including poverty, homelessness, rising inequality, unemployment and industrial disputes and connects with the plays of Bond and Storey more than the works of Hare and Wilson, although its subject matter is very much of the new decade.

*Magnificence* opens in a squat. Five young activists have taken over the building for political reasons. The room has become a grubby barracks for their cause. Fired up by left-wing idealism but short on pragmatism, they discover that the revolution may be a long time coming and their political passion begins to wilt and decay, much like their food. Their disillusionment is echoed in the second strand of the play, the meeting of two Tory MPs in Cambridge, where there is a passing of the reins of power. This juxtaposition of ostensibly opposite worlds, reveals common ground. The two plot lines collide when revolutionary Jed is driven to extreme violence. He packs a rucksack with explosives and sets off to place a bomb around the head of one of the MPs and accidentally kills himself and his victim.

The sense of lived-experience of this play provides a depth that is absent from other works by the emergent 1970s writers. *Magnificence* is considered a key play of its time, although it sold only 35% capacity, and was therefore a financial risk.<sup>61</sup> Martin Esslin praised it as a 'genuine' exploration of an issue, an interesting choice of adjective in light of the fact that many of Brenton's associates were writing on subjects of which they had no experience and, as a result, for which an representative voice was sometimes absent.

As is often the case when the emergent playwrights reminisce about their work

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<sup>61</sup> An inventory of the percentage of seats sold titled 'Oscar Lewenstein First Year Royal Court', dated Dec. 27<sup>th</sup>, 1973. Donald Howarth's personal archive, Hammersmith.

showing at the Court during this era, the management's, and particularly Anderson's, objections to their work are underscored. Anderson was not a fan of Brenton's play; in the marginal comments of the playscript he described Brenton as a 'witty flaneur' and 'like David Hare at his worst' (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 166). Anderson's comments serve as an example of how little his opinion of this new generation really mattered. Despite the elder director's apparent loathing of Brenton's work, *Magnificence* went on regardless, and on the main stage. Anderson either did not have the power to prevent the programming of this play or, despite his dislike of it, he was not willing to halt its appearance on the programme. Anderson was not alone in lack of appreciation of the play. He had unlikely sympathisers on the alternative scene as *Magnificence* was controversial within radical circles because it questioned the legitimacy of revolutionary action. One radical member of the audience was provoked into shouting from the stalls: 'Bourgeois Rubbish!' (ibid). In his memoirs, Hare provides an example of similar behavior in regard to work by the emergent writers:

Before leaving England at the end of 1973, I managed to infiltrate a Snoo Wilson play *The Pleasure Principle* into the Theatre Upstairs.... it was a madcap assault, complete with the fireworks of George Fenton... running around in a gorilla suit. (Hare, 2015: 194)

Hare's use of the word 'infiltrate' is Hare making light of the fact that the plays he supported were, in his perception, unwelcome at the Court. Likewise, Wilson describes the moment he was informed the play was to be staged: 'My youthful delight at hearing it awoke the tetchy schoolmarm that slept fitfully inside Oscar... "But it is a very slight play," Oscar added unnecessarily, staring fiercely up at the author' (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 167).

There can be little doubt that a number of Court management figures were not overly enthusiastic about work by the emergent 1970s writers; they have all admitted this to be the case at various times. The young writers have consistently claimed that their plays were not championed due to the political aspect of their work. As has been shown, this is a feeble claim and it serves as a distraction. The work of the young writers was not particularly political and when it was, it was supported by the Court. The somewhat non-traditional

praxis that the young writers occasionally employed, and their, tenuous, association with the alternative scene was perhaps the greater issue. The fact remains, however, that whatever their misgivings, the Court management provided a platform for this emergent group, and at a time when the Court's literary department received close to a thousand plays yearly that were not ever staged. Therefore, the young playwrights' dissatisfaction with the Court of this period is more likely linked to the manner and/or the extent of this support. It is possible that they did not receive the degree of support they wanted or expected, or to which they may have felt entitled.

The greater question that arises is why the Court management opted to programme a play supposedly examining feminism, that was written by a young male playwright when there were plays on the subject being written by women. Likewise, it appears strange that the Court would commission a play on the Troubles created by a group of seven Englishmen on holiday in Wales and who were unconnected to Ireland, when there were Irish playwrights writing on the subject, some of them even living in London. By extension these peculiar decisions also beg inquiry as to why there was no debate on this matter amongst or between the white male English management and the white male English playwrights, or why this has not to date been investigated in scholarship.

Stories regarding the antagonism between the Court management and the young playwrights appear to stem largely from oft-retold, amusing, and possibly by now exaggerated, anecdotes regarding the management's distaste for their work. Anderson is particularly singled out as being vehemently opposed to the emergent writers' oeuvre. His criticisms of them are the most often quoted: 'If it's living in the past I want to go on living in the past. I don't like these writers and I don't want their work to go on' (Devine, H.2006: 153). Accordingly, scholarship has also long recorded Anderson's hostility (Findlater, 1980: 142; Devine, H., 2006: 155). As Wright claims, '[Anderson] thought they were a mockery.'<sup>62</sup> One of the more frequently repeated stories has Anderson storming out of a

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<sup>62</sup> Nicholas Wright, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, May 16th, 2016, Notting Hill, London.

performance of *Magnificence* and climbing over audience members to do so (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 166). Indeed, there is much evidence to demonstrate Anderson's opposition to both the emergent 1970s writers and to the alternative movement. He even temporarily closed the Theatre Upstairs whilst Gaskill was directing elsewhere in 1969, though Gaskill swiftly re-opened it upon his return (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 116). His belligerent stance has become legendary in the received narrative.

It is enlightening therefore, to note a letter Anderson wrote to the council members of the English Stage Company on May 30<sup>th</sup> 1975, to counter what he claimed was an erroneous report in *The Guardian* penned by Michael Billington regarding his reasons for leaving the Artistic Committee and not to accept an invitation to serve on the Council. He claims that he had merely come to the end of his contract and that he did not leave acrimoniously. In this letter, Anderson further petitions the committee to have the Theatre Upstairs re-open that year, as it had earlier been closed by the new management. Anderson's commentary praises the developments at the Theatre Upstairs, which could suggest his resistance to the new movement has been exaggerated over time:

[The Theatre Upstairs] were not a part of the Royal Court's activities with which I have ever been closely associated – or perhaps even as sympathetic as I should have been. But there is no denying that its achievements over the last three or four years have been quite outstanding, and have added immeasurably to the reputation of the theatre.<sup>63</sup>

Admittedly, this comment could be construed as a farewell to the troops, yet Anderson did support the appointment of Wright and Kidd as successors to Lewenstein.

Many years later, in response to having read Lewenstein's autobiography, Anderson wrote to him on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994 to contest a number of points made in Lewenstein's book. Anderson states in his letter that his recollection of the triumvirate period in particular is divergent from Lewenstein's:

And did Bill really say that sharing the Artistic Directorship with Anthony and myself was "a constant tussle"? Actually I thought we got on pretty well, and I certainly never objected to any play that Bill wanted to direct – whether I like it or

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<sup>63</sup> Letter from Anderson to the council members of the English Stage Company, May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1975. Donald Howarth's personal archive, 9 Lower Mall, London.

not. That was how the “triumvirate” worked, between three rather different people, each mutually respecting each other’s wishes and choices.<sup>64</sup>

Anderson proceeds to demonstrate how his allegiances were wont to change and his language illustrates a petulant side to his character, which somewhat bolsters Lewenstein’s description of his nature:

You’re quite right in saying that I did support Nicholas Wright and Robert Kidd in their application to run the theatre, but essentially because they seemed to me the only inheritors of the Devine-Richardson tradition in which we’d all grown up. I was wrong, of course, and they absolutely lacked the talent. (In fact I’ve no hesitation in saying that I think Nicholas Wright is a little turd!). It’s certainly true that I’ve never been asked to direct a play in Sloane Square by either Wright, Kidd, Stuart Burge, Max Stafford-Clark or Stephen Daldry, since *WHAT THE BUTLER SAW*. I’ve no doubt it’s got to something to do with my unfortunate personality...<sup>65</sup>

Anderson’s reactions possibly rendered accounts of his objections to new work something of an in-joke at the Court, which may in turn have been elaborated over time in their re-telling. His objections certainly did not halt the programming of work by the young writers.

Stories regarding Anderson and the management at the Court have coalesced into an understanding that the Court management was anachronistic and blind to new talent and new directions. The emergent playwrights’ version of events thus neatly fits the classic trope of an old guard working as a defensive conservative force resistant to change and increasingly impotent in the face of new demands in a new world they did not understand. It is a perception of the narrative to which Stafford-Clark also subscribes:

Anderson and [Jocelyn] Herbert were radically right wing. Lindsay misconceived the new movement, we had no more a cohesive agenda than the Labour party do now. Jocelyn Herbert was very concerned about an *après nous la déluge*, which is a common concern in theatre companies; the established are suspicious of youthful idealism. Movements start out being experimental, then they become the mainstream and eventually the boulevard. Beckett is a very good example of this, at first he was considered inaccessible, now he is West End with Ian McKellen, Patrick Stewart and Simon Callow.<sup>66</sup>

Stafford-Clark’s commentary appears exaggerated. Even if they were not supporters of the alternative movement, it is highly contestable that either Anderson or Herbert were

<sup>64</sup> Letter from Anderson to Lewenstein, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994. Donald Howarth’s personal archive, 9 Lower Mall, London.

<sup>65</sup> Donald Howarth’s personal archive, 9 Lower Mall, London.

<sup>66</sup> Max Stafford-Clark, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Out of Joint Offices, Finsbury Park, London.

‘radically right wing’ considering both had worked for decades with progressive theatre of a liberal tendency. Other members of the management were notably accommodating towards both the emergent 1970s writers and the alternative movement. Gaskill later went on to form Joint Stock with Hare and Stafford-Clark, a touring theatre company which was influenced by alternative praxis. Triumvirate co-Artistic Director Anthony Page’s support of the emergent writers and his admiration of the alternative scene has also been recorded. Page referred to the opening of the Theatre Upstairs as: ‘an incredible development, I had a feeling the theatre should be very vital and eclectic. I didn’t like cerebral theatre very much’ (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 116). It is clear, that whatever the truth of this narrative, it is more nuanced and complicated than a clean generational or artistic division.

Presenting the tensions at the Court as defensive attempts by veteran management to quell the challenge posed by a new generation of confident, politically-aware playwrights is therefore unhelpful as an explanation; such a narrative is reductive and misleading. It is also helpful for the focus of this study to note that there was no distinct generational divide. Many of the key figures from both the 1960s and 1970s were broadly of the same generation, at least in terms of age.<sup>67</sup> In a wide sense, the emerging white male playwrights of the 1970s also shared the left-wing political convictions of their 1960s predecessors, and even those of the management at the Court. They were all ostensibly critical of imperialism and espoused views denouncing social inequalities and racism. Many of them shared a generational habitus, in a sense which accords Bourdieu’s theories on generation (Bourdieu 1977: 78, cited in Gilleard, Higgs, 2005: 70).

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<sup>67</sup> If generation is defined by years of birth, it should be noted that there was not a great or distinct generational divide between the various factions at the Court, which contradicts the claims of writers such as Hare who frequently suggest the conflict between the post-1968 playwrights and the management at the Court was generation bound. The artistic management at the Court during the 1968-1975 period had been born before World War II: Lewenstein (1917-1997), Gaskill (1934-2016) Page (1935 - ) Anderson (1923-1994), as were the 1960s working-class playwrights who had mostly been born in the 1930s: Bond (1934-), Wesker (1932-2016) Storey (1933-2017); the 1970s Playwrights were largely, but not all, born in the ‘Baby-Boom’ years which succeeded World War II (Hare (1947-), Edgar (1948-), Wilson (1948-2013), Brenton (1942-), Griffiths (1935 -) and Clark (1932-). These groups were not divided by a generation, rather a decade or so lay between them and even this is not a precise or exclusive ring-fencing. Clark and Griffiths were, for example, generational contemporaries with Bond, Wesker, Gaskill and Page. These groups were not really generationally distinct. Therefore, a narrative wholly rooted in age-bound generational conflict appears unlikely, or at least not the entire story.

Likewise, there was not a particular strong artistic contrast in their respective approach to playwriting, at least not compared to some of the non-literary work emerging directly from the alternative scene elsewhere.

### **1.8 Conclusion**

There was unease at the Court during this period, and there was some resistance to alternative theatre at the Court, yet a number of senior Court figures including Gaskill and Page also made a determined effort to include alternative theatre in the Court's programme, even if they personally admitted to feeling ambivalent about the movement's ethos. And, perhaps more interestingly, the emergent 1970s playwrights were themselves reluctant to wholly embrace the alternative scene and its praxis in its entirety as they remained loyal to traditional literary theatre, and also because they comprised a homogenous and elite demographic. Their literary approach means they had more in common with the writers of the 1960s than they had with theatre-makers of the alternative scene.

Most significant for this thesis is the fact that the emergent writers of the 1970s shared gender, nationality and ethnicity with both the writers of the 1960s and the management of the Court. In the very early 1970s at the Court, there appears to have been a perhaps unconscious resistance to any challenge to the hierarchy or more specifically the Anglo-centric patriarchy which held sway at the Sloane Square theatre. The Court's young playwrights showed no keenness to share the Court's stage with female, non-white and non-British playwrights. In Chapter Two, this thesis explores how these specific issues were underlying the unease at the Court in the 1970s.

## Chapter Two

### The impact of the decline of empire

‘Don’t clap too hard – it’s a very old building’.<sup>68</sup>

This chapter will demonstrate that, during the 1960s and early 1970s, British society and the establishment, those with power and authority, felt challenged, insecure and defensive as the British Empire disintegrated. Resultantly wary of American cultural expansion and of general non-British cultural influence, there was a discernable anxiety regarding the health and future of British art and culture. There is evidence of a related preoccupation with the heyday of British Empire or what the academic Paul Gilroy has referred to part of the general ‘postcolonial melancholia’, in his book of the same name (Gilroy, 2006). The management and playwrights at the Court had been raised during the time of empire and were inculcated with its values and dynamics. In many aspects the Court reflected and was structured in accordance with the orthodoxies and ethos of that bygone era. These were the years of British declinism and there are signs of an institutional habitus at the Court, that, to a certain degree, defensively resisted ‘foreign’ influence. For the Court’s management, the emergent 1970s writers posed a threat because they were influenced by and admiring of the new directions in theatre, which had arrived very largely from America and were gaining a foothold in Britain.

#### i. Post imperial tensions and anxiety in Britain

To properly understand and consider the conscious and subconscious fears of the Court’s management of the 1960s and 1970s and to determine what specific aspects of alternative theatre aroused their suspicions, it is useful to begin by regarding the broad social and economic climate of the 1960s. It is beneficial to firstly dispense with the legend of the ‘swinging sixties’. Within the history of the relatively modern convention

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<sup>68</sup> Archie Rice, *The Entertainer* (Osborne, 1957 [1991]: 80)



of ‘decadism’, the 1960s loom large. In the collective imagination, there is an impression of Britain in this era as an exciting place, and this description has cemented, globally, in the popular narrative of the decade. According to this history, the decade brimmed with unbridled optimism and exuded creative energy in the British arts. This image of an exciting, fashionable and ‘swinging’ London was reported and promoted in the fashionable press at the time. It is the *Vogue Magazine* editor Diana Vreeland who declares in the *Weekend Telegraph*, 1965 that ‘London is the most swinging city in the world at the moment’.<sup>69</sup> This observation is echoed a year later in a 1966 edition of the American publication *Time Magazine* which pronounces of London: ‘In a decade dominated by youth, London has burst into bloom. It swings; it is the scene’. As a result, the memorable and alliterative phrase the ‘swinging sixties’ has become a snappy shorthand for the era.

Hence, to the layman, and from a temporal distance it may seem that Britain had much to celebrate during this decade. This narrative is not entirely without foundation. The British pop quartet The Beatles were the biggest rock group on the planet, closely followed by London band The Rolling Stones. The British designer Mary Quant, British interior and furniture designer Terence Conran and the British hair stylist Vidal Sassoon all bestowed on the decade its global aesthetic. This prominence of British artists indeed suggests a forward-facing, inspired time, with the country situated firmly at the centre of the international cultural stage. This version of history presents the decade as a giddy ten years of social and sexual liberation; there is even speculation that this sense of freedom springs from a happy release from the responsibility of running an empire. It is an image so ingrained in the international understanding of this era that ironic creations such as the 1997 *Austin Powers* series which satirise the attitudes, style, language and culture of

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<sup>69</sup> Quoted by John Crosby, *Weekend Telegraph*, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 1965.

‘swinging London’ of the 1960s, have a global commercial appeal years after that decade drew to a close.

Such a broad-stroke, almost caricature-like representation of 1960s Britain could not be and is not an accurate or whole portrait of the decade, however, and this fact has been explored thoroughly in scholarship (Marwick, 1999; Bull, 2017: 27-31; Sandbrook, 2006). Throughout these ten years, the number of people having their hair cut by Vidal Sassoon, their houses furnished by *Habitat* of the Kings Road, who socialised with The Beatles or who were generally experiencing the vortex of creative energy associated with the 1960s, was a very tiny London-based constituency. For the rest of the population, the 1960s presented a more nuanced, conflicted and complex experience, and to a certain extent it was a challenging decade, particularly so for the lower classes, although the decade proved unnerving for the upper classes also, as this chapter discerns.

Firstly, for orientation, this chapter briefly defines and demarcates the British Empire and maps its demise. It looks at how this decline coincided with an economic downturn and a rise in racial tensions in Britain in the 1960s, which aggravated social stresses and fear of the foreign. It considers how foreign cultural influence worried the establishment and evinces the darker, less-celebrated face of the Britain of this decade, demonstrating that this era was concurrently haunted, repelled and fascinated by the more powerful Victorian and Edwardian imperial periods. This chapter further demonstrates that this preoccupation with the time of empire is traceable in the Court’s programme, and also the tastes, leanings and reactions of its management and the institutional habitus of the Court.

In reflecting on how the decline of the British Empire influenced the culture of the Court, it is imperative to define what the term ‘British Empire’ encompasses. The historian John Darwin describes the concept of ‘empire’ as ‘The assertion of mastery (by influence or rule) by one ethnic group, or its rulers, over a number of others’ (Darwin, 1, 2009: 284), whilst Stephen Howe offers that it is a ‘large political body which rules over territories

outside its original border' (Howe, 2002: 14). The broad consensus in scholarship is that the term 'British Empire' refers to the dominions and colonies that were ruled by the United Kingdom, and its predecessor states. The British Empire had a number of related, consecutive yet divergent incarnations of empire, all of which adhere to these descriptions. Over approximately four centuries, Britain had ruled over different global regions in disparate ways. The shifts of focus, geographic, governmental and economic, have led some authorities such as Sarah Stockwell to contend in 2008, 'there was not one British Empire, but several' (Stockwell, 2008: 217).<sup>70</sup>

The most significant enlargement of the British Empire occurred during the period 1815-1914, and resulted in Britain's brief governance of roughly a quarter of the world's population, and covered approximately the same proportion of the Earth's surface. The phrase 'the empire on which the sun never sets' was used both metaphorically and in reference to the British Empire's geographic expanse over the gamut of time zones. It is this third, most extensive and arguably most successful incarnation of the British Empire, that of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, that is specifically meant here when referring to the 'imperial era'.

World War I changed everything for the British Empire, everywhere. Although, in theory the British Empire emerged from the Great War larger than ever before, having come away from Versailles with additional colonies such as Palestine and Tanganyika, in reality fault lines were apparent. The Empire's foundations had been initially challenged by an uprising in 1916 which occurred in Britain's first ever colony, Ireland.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> The foundations of the British imperial era can be traced to the first and subsequent English invasions of Ireland in the 12th century; the more durable plantation and colonisation of Britain's neighbouring island did not occur until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was also during the 17<sup>th</sup> century that Britain established colonies in the Caribbean and on the main continent of America, the governance of which it was to lose in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the American War of Independence. Despite this loss, the British Empire contemporaneously acquired further territories in East Asia and the newly-discovered Australasia. It then became briefly, at its peak, the largest empire recorded in history.

<sup>71</sup> Although the Irish rebellion was eventually suppressed, six years of hostilities and guerrilla warfare between Britain and Ireland ensued, culminating in the signing of the Anglo-Irish treaty in 1921, which led to the founding of the Free State (later the Republic of Ireland). The island was to be divided. The north eastern corner of the island, roughly 20% of the island, had been the region most rigorously colonised by British troops during the 17<sup>th</sup> century plantations, and the descendants of these planters remained staunchly loyal to Britain and the Crown, and accordingly were also known

The Irish fight for independence emboldened movements for self-determination in India, Egypt and beyond. Repressive measures by the British became more aggressive. The most notorious example of such force was the Amritsar Massacre in 1919, when a crowd of unarmed protesters were fired upon by British troops, resulting in a large death toll (a contested figure, but thought to be in the territory of 1,000 dead). In 1922, Egypt was granted independence although it was agreed that British troops would remain at the Suez Canal zone. The 1923 Imperial Conference recognised the right for dominions to set their own foreign policy, and was followed at the 1926 Imperial Conference with the Balfour Declaration of 'autonomous colonies within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate to one another within a British Commonwealth of Nations' (Clarke, 1996: 266; Butler: 182-183).

Later, World War II had profound effects on all European empires. The continent lay in ruins. Britain was bankrupt and in financial debt to the US.<sup>72</sup> Global power now tugged between Moscow and Washington. The dissolution of the British Empire had begun in earnest and reached its climax in the early 1960s, accelerated by exposés of British colonial atrocities throughout the 1950s, such as those that took place in Cyprus, the Hola Camp and Nyasaland. These were incidents where British military force had been deployed to preserve British power and reputation, yet the events that unfolded damaged Britain's international standing. Thus, the British ultimately began to yield authority in order to preserve their international prestige.

In 1959, the East African colonies of Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika all secured home rule and independence ensued within a few years. Nigeria, Gambia and Sierra Leone soon followed suit (Clarke, 1996: 266). Harold Macmillan, the patrician Conservative Prime

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as 'Unionists' or 'Loyalists'. British by culture and descent and Protestant in faith (largely Presbyterian), they had never assimilated and remained ethnically and culturally distinct and self-segregated from the native Irish. These Unionists formed a combined majority within the counties of Fermanagh, Armagh, Tyrone, Derry, Antrim and Down. Hence, the outcome of the treaty was that these six of Ulster's nine counties, comprising a fifth of the island, remained under British rule. It was a division that was to cast a long shadow on relations between the neighbouring islands of Britain and Ireland throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

<sup>72</sup> A post-war loan that was not repaid until 2006.

Minister of Britain 1957-1963, famously stated in a 1960 Cape Town address to the Parliament of South Africa that ‘the wind of change is blowing through this continent’. This speech, stonily received by the all-white colonialist audience, was telegraphing to the world that Britain would soon grant independence to all its colonies in Africa. Macmillan had in fact made the same speech the previous month in Accra, Ghana, albeit with little press coverage, which indicates that he wished to emphasise this message on this African tour.

Another underlying reason Britain was ready to relinquish its empire was a fear in some quarters that the African colonies were in threat of penetration by the Soviet Union, and thus were a potential source of unwanted tension during the Cold War years (Ovendale, 1995: 455-477). Whilst the right-wing historian Niall Fergusson controversially contends, ‘the bottom line was, of course, the economy... Britain was simply no longer able to bear the costs of Empire’ (Ferguson, 2003: 360). In 1965, what became known as the ‘White Settler Revolt’ occurred in the then self-governing Southern Rhodesia, and became a further source of embarrassment for Britain. This event was followed two years later by the decision to withdraw Britain's military presence east of Suez. All these factors combined with growing native demands for self-determination. As Ferguson highlights, the demise of the breadth of British dominion occurred with astonishing, and in Fergusson’s opinion in certain cases, with what he termed ‘excessive’ speed in the 1960s (Ferguson, 2003: 356). The end of empire was broadly understood to be inevitable and in total, over the course of the 1960s, twenty-seven former colonies in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean became independent.

As the British Empire disintegrated, and in contrast to the general memory of the 1960s as a boom era, there was also parallel economic turbulence in Britain which exacerbated social nervousness and a fear that the country was entering more challenging times. Late in 1960, the gap between revenue from exports and expenditure from imports was widening and a crisis seemed imminent with threatened strikes from dockers and workers in the manufacturing sector. This was an era when the power of labour was a far stronger force than in today’s Britain. In the 1960s, a strike would have serious impact on

the economy and workers would use this leverage to bid up their wage. A freeze on public sector wage rises was implemented, which had little influence and was widely unpopular (Bull, 2017: 11). The Conservatives later lost the 1964 election, and the Labour Party came into power, with Harold Wilson at the helm.

Labour duly inherited a £800m deficit from the Conservatives, and although this amount was somewhat reduced over the subsequent three years, the cost of hostilities in the Middle East, the closure of the Suez Canal and the disruption to exports through the dock strikes had contributed to the pressure on sterling. In 1967, Prime Minister Wilson announced a devaluation of the pound by 14% against the dollar. The decision followed weeks of speculation, and the Bank of England spending £200 million in an effort to shore up the pound from its gold reserves. By the beginning of 1968, it was becoming clear that this measure had not achieved the intended effect of stabilising the currency. The decline of Sterling was seen as a symptom of the country's economic downward trend: from 25% of world manufacturing exports in 1950, Britain had 10% of global exports by 1970 (Blair, 2015: 55). Despite the progressive social reforms and new permissive attitudes of the 1960s, by 1970, the Conservatives, in a government headed by Edward Heath, had won a surprise return to power (Sked, Cook, 1979: 247-252). In clear contrast to the ingrained public recall of Britain in the 1960s, this decade comprised an era of political and economic instability, and it was the lower classes who felt this anxiety most keenly.

## **ii. Social change is reflected in theatre**

Theatres began to programme plays which scrutinised the poorer strata of society. The Theatre Royal Stratford East was the first to do so. Examples of this new focus include Irishman Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow* (1954), which he brought to Littlewood's theatre in 1956. This play concerns social outcasts, the criminal and the deeply impoverished. It is set on death row in a Dublin prison and is alive with black humour and rambunctious farce. *The Quare Fellow* gives a platform to a previously less heeded section of society and celebrates and elevates Irish culture on the London stage. It was also Littlewood who also first championed Shelagh Delaney, a Northern working-class teenager

whose breakthrough play *A Taste of Honey* (1958) was a lone female voice amongst the very male ‘angry young men’ of the era.<sup>73</sup> Later, the televisual equivalent of this dramatic grittiness is most typically exemplified by Ken Loach’s 1966 *Cathy Come Home*, a ‘kitchen-sink’ style BBC Wednesday Afternoon Play which explores eviction, homelessness and dispossession in contemporary Britain.<sup>74</sup>

### iii. Social change is reflected at the Court

Sloane Square theatre demonstrated its awareness of the new trend by its introduction of the ‘kitchen sink’ dramas, spawned in 1956 by Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*. This genre of play, with which the Court was to be long associated, explored a lower milieu of society in an apparently frank fashion.

Osborne’s Court plays of this era are certainly good indicators of the social strife as they are amenable to a class based interpretation, a point explored in more detail later in this chapter. Osborne’s works evince the specific fears and anxieties of the lower classes at this time. They also provide revealing insight into the Court’s relationship with the British Empire. It is salutary to note that Osborne tended not to concern himself with the working class *per se*, but rather more with the lower-middle classes, the social echelon from which he had emerged. In *Look Back in Anger* (1956), it is the small-time sweet trader Jimmy raging against his middle class wife and in-laws. Osborne’s follow-up play, *The Entertainer* (1957), also considers lower middle-class entertainers.

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<sup>73</sup> *A Taste of Honey* explored the life of a working class Salford female Jo, who falls pregnant with a mixed race child and finds support from a gay friend, Geoffrey. As Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr observes, far from showing the world according to the educated white male, Delaney packed issues of class race, gender and sexuality into her play at a time when homosexuality was still illegal, class prejudice was rife and women and minorities struggled to find fair treatment in society as well as full representation on the stage (Shepherd-Barr, 2016: 73).

<sup>74</sup> Grim and realistic, the play concerns the journey into homelessness of an ordinary young couple and depicts a markedly different society to that of the ‘swinging’ legend. The play was a critical and commercial success and was watched by a quarter of the population. It fueled support for organisations such as ‘Shelter’ and demonstrably struck a chord with the populace (Bull, 2017: 28). *Cathy Come Home* bolsters the historian Dominic Sandbrook’s assertion that ‘swinging London’ was a peripheral phenomenon which did not engage the attention of the vast majority of the British public (Sandbrook, 2007: 566).

## 2.1 The Court's power structure viewed via Bourdieu's theory of habitus

Osborne's plays can demonstrate how, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Court was primarily concerned with the era's social and political impact upon the angry young lower middle-class English male, whilst elsewhere in progressive theatre, the focus was increasingly on the more challenging situations vested upon women, working-class Irish caught up in the 'Troubles', and under-class immigrants. For this reason, it is beneficial to consider the internal culture of the Court at this time. The theories of Bourdieu are useful in this endeavor, most especially his theory of habitus. This is a difficult theory to summarise, however, the following interpretation is helpful:

[Habitus is] the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them. (Wacquant 2005: 316)

Bourdieu's concept of habitus refers to how an individual perceives the world and their position within it. The word is formed from that which is 'habitual'; its focus is societal and structural and refers to actions and social structures that an individual engages with, influences and is influenced by, and of which the individual is also constitutive. Bourdieu's concept aids in understanding how behaviour that may seem peculiar to the outsider, goes unchallenged, unquestioned and somewhat unseen within an institution, as it is an accepted convention in both a conscious and a subconscious way. Bourdieu's theory is useful in exploring the dynamics of both the Court management's attitude towards outside or foreign influence. It sheds light on the theatre's paradoxes and it explains, to a certain extent, the emergent 1970s playwrights' sense of entitlement to the Court's main stage.

Habitus has commonalities with the concept of social or ethnic culture but there is greater focus on the complex social structures and quotidian influences within which an individual operates on a daily basis and there is a significant subconscious element at play. This theory regards how perceptions of social norms and habits are formed over time, and that they are created and influenced by the individual's gender, social status, age and experiences, which will in turn, contribute to and uphold this same habitus.



Bourdieu's theory helps to comprehend how an individual internalises the external. If an individual has been raised within an empire and has belonged to its governing and privileged class, the individual will have a specific way of viewing the world that is distinct from someone who was raised as part of a subaltern demographic within the same empire, or someone not raised in an empire at all. Habitus in this sense, will refer to what an individual may take for granted, or what they may understand as 'common sense'. It will inform the vocabulary an individual acquires, how they interact, their judgement, how they develop, their ambitions and what their expectations are. Habitus is not fixed and the individual is not dominated by their habitus and can contribute to and influence it. Nor is one's habitus exclusively divided along class, generational or ethnic lines *per se*, although these factors can influence habitus. Bourdieu describes habitus as:

Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu, 1990: 53)<sup>75</sup>

It can, and does, change and adapt according to outside influences but it does so gradually and not readily. In essence, it is a world view and a way of operating and it is not necessarily a conscious perspective. Employing Bourdieu's concept of habitus is helpful in seeing how the internal culture of the Court, and particularly how its 'institutional habitus', was still steeped in the culture, dynamics, apparatus and mechanics of an imperial Britain in which most of its participants were raised.

Through the lens of Bourdieu's theory, the culture at the Court is revealed as one wherein the white English male was prioritised and this state was largely unchallenged. Additionally, there was likely a collective anxiety, however subconscious, provoked by any threat to this patriarchy or any challenge to the monopoly the English middle class held on the power structures at the institution. It is plausible that a sense of impending social change

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<sup>75</sup> Bourdieu's definition can be informally simplified as the 'structuring structures of the structured structure'.

was informing the tensions at the Court, therefore. In addition to this fear of class displacement, was knowledge that a form of theatre rooted in a foreign culture, largely American, was strengthening and gaining a foothold in London, threatening to usurp the hegemonic power structures. Viewed through this prism of habitus, plays such as Hare's *Slag* can be seen as a metaphor for an institutional habitus under threat.

#### **i. The Court's institutional habitus**

Bourdieu's theory can additionally be useful in determining the reasons why this hegemony went largely unchallenged at a progressive institution such as the Court throughout the social tumult of the 1960s and into the early 1970s. Habitus is created by an interplay between social structures and individual will or choice; it is formed by dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures. It sculpts current practices and structures and also, pertinently, conditions our perceptions of the same (Bourdieu 1984: 170). This leads to an unconscious acceptance of social differences and hierarchies, provides 'a sense of one's place' and creates behaviours of self-exclusion (Bourdieu, 1986: 141). Thus, dispositions are deeply embedded and become 'the way things are done'. At an institution such as the Court, this forms an institutional habitus.

The Court had indeed quickly become a 'way of life' for many figures involved in its history and was in a sense, comparable to a religious vocation. It is of note, therefore, that in an unpublished article in Howarth's personal archive, Devine writes:

At the time of writing this I happened to be asked to give some advice by my godson, Nicholas Hutchinson – son of Peggy Ashcroft – who wanted to enter the British Theatre. He asked what theatre he should go to and what I said to him might give a more explicit idea of what I feel. I said you should choose your theatre like you choose a religion. Make sure you don't get into the wrong temple.<sup>76</sup>

Gaskill also comments, 'The climate around the Court was very emotional and people's personal relationships were woven into the fabric of the work there, but there was also a

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<sup>76</sup> Unpublished article written by George Devine, in Donald Howarth's personal archive, Lower Mall, Hammersmith.

certain stability of theatrical values' (Gaskill in Courtney, 1993: 214). Gaskill's mention of 'values' is key here; the Court had its own ethos, culture and value system.

Like individual habitus, institutional habitus is not fixed and it can change, but can do so only gradually. Institutional habitus structures and is structured by interactions with social agents and is a product of its history whilst also being informed and shaped by contemporaneous events. It is durable and long lasting, but it is capable of evolving. Nonetheless, despite its ability to be flexible, any alteration to its structures comes slowly, even more so than individual habitus, due to its institutional nature and the number of people involved. In the 1960s, the Court displayed an institutional habitus rooted simultaneously in middle-class Oxford University culture and the imperial culture within which its middle-class management were raised. They had all been brought up in the years of empire, immersed, inculcated and nurtured in that culture. Anderson, for example, had been born in India and was raised by an *ayah*, or indigenous Indian nanny, before being sent to boarding school in England. The institutional habitus at the Court favoured the white middle-class English male to positions of prominence and power and its unconscious aspect meant it was possible for this establishment to present itself as anti-authoritarian, and concurrently adhere to a deeply conservative power structure which supported an elite patrician class for its managerial ranks.

In mapping a connection between the impact and legacy of imperialism and works programmed at the Court, it is also useful to draw on the writings of Edward Said, who contends that culture and imperialism have a symbiotic connection, and far from being innocent, culture is active in the machine of imperialism (Said, 1993: xiv). An inverse of this theory suggests that the occlusion or neglect of another culture is also an action of imperial suppression. In her celebrated essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Spivak theorises that cultural imperialism renders dominated groups unable to represent themselves in their own voices, as it mutes, subjugates, excludes, disqualifies or erases their art and scholarship and renders such voices impossible to recover (Spivak, 2010: 40-41). She posits that the dominant culture and its scholars are constructed in a way so as to support its own economic

interests and progress its hegemony. Spivak's understanding of this power dynamic can be employed to reveal programming at the Court during the 1968-1972 era, as hegemonic and self-serving, with preference given to the dominant English culture. The voice of the ethnic minorities from the former colonies is sometimes harvested and appropriated by white English playwrights, and subsequently presented at the Court to a white English audience. Subaltern playwrights were routinely excluded from this discourse and denied a platform.

## **2.2 A fear of foreign influence within British society**

As the 'kitchen-sink' genre implies, the real history of the 1960s for the vast majority of Britons was that of an economically challenging, uneasy and anxious time. Once a world leader culturally, economically and politically, by the early years of the decade Britain's influence was fading fast. The British Empire was in terminal decline and British society was grappling with this retreat; it brought with it an insecurity and a fear of encroaching foreign influence. Near-depleted of international prestige, by the early 1960s Britain was being edged towards the wings of the world stage. There was the recent forging of the European Economic Community, of which Britain was not yet a part. Additionally, the USA's global influence was waxing and that country was becoming increasingly important politically, culturally and economically. American cinema, music, television, fashion and fast food restaurants were being enthusiastically embraced by rising generations globally and there was a discernable unease about American cultural influence in Britain, particularly so within the British establishment.

In 1962, the former U.S. Secretary of State, Dean Acheson had famously employed a theatrical metaphor when he stated: 'Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role' (Ferguson, 2003: 365; Butler, 2002: 167). Quentin Hogg, the Conservative politician, echoed Acheson's earlier observation when he was prompted to comment in 1966 that the British were a 'people that had lost its way' (*Time & Tide*, July 1966). Compounding this sidelining, in 1963, the newly formed European Economic Community (EEC), which had brought those other great European powers France and Germany closer together, saw

General Charles de Gaulle exercise his veto over Britain's application to join the union, thus further limiting British power. Although not all factors contributing to the insecurity were related to the demise of the British Empire, they exasperated the sense of loss of influence.

**i. A fear of foreign influence mapped at the Court**

In terms of theatre, and specifically the Court, the decline of the British Empire began to draw reaction from Court programming, in that, increasingly, there was a resistance to outside influence which had not previously been evident. Rebellato highlights that, in the thirty years before 1956, continental European theatre had been growing in prominence on British club stages, with Kaiser, Toller, Wedekind and Maeterlinck all championed (Rebellato 1999: 127; Marshall, 1947: 45). The influence of these playwrights was seen largely in touring repertoire (Rebellato 1999: 128). There were some critics who saw this 'invasion' as a humiliation for British theatre. Over time, this defensiveness became more acute as the Empire went into decline and awakened a dormant reactionary nationalism. Rebellato further recounts a lament of Kenneth Tynan in 1956, in which the critic noted, 'the general impotence of our theatre is the laughing stock of the Continent' (Rebellato, 1999: 129). It is significant therefore that Osborne's very English *Look Back in Anger*, which debuted at the Court, appealed to Tynan, albeit not with the wild enthusiasm for which he has been retrospectively credited. Osborne had written a very English play that looked back wistfully on a 'stronger' time. Rebellato describes Jimmy's 'rage at the direction of a society, yet a recognition that the past cannot be recaptured... [he] fumes at the inadequacy and nervousness of the people around him, hankers after the certainty of the Edwardians but knows it has gone for good' (Rebellato, 1999: 142).

It is a paradox that the Court in the 1960s would become reluctant to embrace foreign influence, as this was a theatre once led by a committed Europhile, Devine, a man who had hoped his new stage company would bring more Continental writers of the calibre of Beckett and Brecht to Britain. The theatre had initially cemented its 'progressive' and 'international' credentials by advancing to programme Ionesco and Beckett's work and demonstrating continental influences from Brecht and Michel Saint Denis. It is salutary to

note here that, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Court was also the first theatre in London to programme works by playwrights of colour, notably Errol John's *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* (1957) and Barry Reckord's *Flesh to a Tiger* (1958).

A decade later, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, the British Empire was all but depleted, Britain was in economic turmoil and the USA was in ascendancy, its culture gaining traction internationally. In contradistinction to the Court's earlier progressive and outward-looking culture, there is evidence that the theatre was now recoiling from foreign influence and there was little evidence of non-British work on its programme. The publicity material for the *Come Together Festival* provides examples of this new attitude as the non-British origins of the alternative movement became something of an issue. British acts from the alternative scene have their 'home grown' aspect of 'Britishness' emphasised 'at a time when much of the experimental work in this country is dominated by American influences, it is refreshing to see a show as original as [The People Show]'.<sup>77</sup> This mildly chauvinistic language is not exclusive to the publicity material of the Court; it can occasionally be found elsewhere on the progressive British theatre scene and in surprising quarters – a study of *Time Out's* Fringe supplement also employs a similar vocabulary to describe British work. The publication concedes that The People Show nods to the European Theatre of the Absurd, but the magazine lauds the former for being in 'the English tradition that inspired the Goon Show rather than the intellectualisation of Continental Writers'.<sup>78</sup> These descriptions hint at an underlying reluctance to cede cultural power and influence, particularly to America, Britain's one-time colony, which was now eclipsing Britain on the international stage.

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<sup>77</sup> Publicity material for *Come Together Festival*, Oct. 21<sup>st</sup> – Nov 9<sup>th</sup>, 1970, The English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, *Come Together Festival* folder, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/6/1/93).

<sup>78</sup> 'Groups Groped', *Time Out*, Oct. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1970, 60-67.

### 2.3 American influences in British Theatre

As has been referenced in Chapter One, there was much vibrancy and innovation on the American alternative terrain in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and accordingly it is not a coincidence that there were three Americans leading the alternative theatre scene in London in the late 1960s.<sup>79</sup> Most prominent was Haynes, the expatriate American and a counter culture exponent who had started a bookshop-cum-theatre in a former brothel in Edinburgh in the 1960s, which became the Traverse Theatre. Haynes and the critic Tynan created an International Drama Conference in 1963, the launch of which scandalously involved a naked young woman. The artistic credentials of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe were assured internationally when Haynes and his associates, Calder and Richard Demarco, began to present cutting-edge drama at the event in 1963. He was particularly pro-active in facilitating visits from non-British theatre troupes and his Edinburgh venue hosted Café La Mama Experimental Theatre Club from New York in 1967, and Jerzy Grotowsky's 13-Rows Theatre, in 1968.

In 1968, Haynes opened the Arts Lab in London, in a warehouse at the top of Drury Lane, which was converted into a variety of spaces for exhibitions, eating, drinking, theatre performances, music and cinema (Itzin, 1980: 9). Although the Arts Lab quickly became popular in the counter culture movement, the establishment was less enthused. *Sunday Times* critic J.W. Lambert disparaged the Arts Lab as a 'doss-house' and did not credit it

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<sup>79</sup> In New York, Joseph Papp's Public Theatre, established in 1967, launched the *Shakespeare in the Park* and introduced 'color blind' casting, which challenged the racism of the era. Devised work and the workshop approach were becoming more popular. In Chicago, the Goodman Theatre introduced the American theatre-going public to the works of David Mamet and John Guare whilst over at the Yale Repertory many of African American playwright August Wilson's first plays were in development. Meanwhile, in Lousiville the Actor's Theatre had begun to stage an annual *New Play Festival* which premiered the works of Marsha Norman and Beth Henley, thus the voice of the female playwright was being heard. By the mid 1970s, a number of theatre companies were providing a platform and support for women's writing. Other female writers who came to the fore during this period were Paula Vogel, Ntozake Shange and Wendy Wasserstein. Chicago was establishing itself as a destination for theatre and its position on the theatrical landscape was further bolstered during the 1970s when Paul Sills of Second City, invited Stuart Gordon and his Organic Theatre to the city. Steppenwolf was founded in 1974 by Terry Kinney, Gary Sinise and Jeff Perry and it premiered the plays of Sam Shepherd, Dusty Hughes, John Guare and Lanford Wilson.

with any cultural weight (Lambert, 1974: 43; Megson, 2012: 39). Peter Ansorge dismissed the venue as a meeting place for coffee-sipping hippies (Ansorge, 1975: 25). Nonetheless, the Arts Lab fostered notable alternative theatre companies such as Portable Theatre, The Freehold, The People Show and the Pip Simmons Group. Additionally, though it had a short life, 1967-1969, Haynes' Arts Club inspired a number of similar venues to open throughout the country, including the Brighton Combination. Haynes recalls the exciting flavor and cross pollination of European and American influences of the period:

The influence was going both ways. European aspects were affecting and influencing America, and Americans were influencing European stuff. There was explosion of the counter culture newspaper at the time and I was involved with the International Times, which The Times later required us to change to IT. People could take articles from any other papers on the underground network and just credit the source, you didn't have to pay copyright. There was a lot of to and froing from San Francisco, London, Amsterdam etc... It was a heady period, a lot of the music was coming from Britain, The Rolling Stones and the Beatles, Pink Floyd. From America you had Dylan, Jefferson, Jim Morrison. It was back and forth stuff. Living Theater was touring Europe, and all that sort of stuff. Music was a big influence, such as Jefferson Airport. I was close to Ellen Stewart who started LaMama Theatre, as we'd been brought up just thirty miles apart. She was running one of the most interesting theatres in America and I had one of the most interesting in Britain.<sup>80</sup>

The other significant American figure of this era in London was Berman. He founded the Inter-Action Trust, which was involved with youth-based performance and was a pioneer of lunchtime theatre, specifically at the Ambiance restaurant in Queensway (Findlater, 1981: 93). In 1970, Berman held a Black and White Power season, providing a platform for non-white voices, including Mustapha Matura, and they in turn inspired black actors Alfred Fagon and T-Bone Wilson to write (Itzin, 1980: 137). Such a championing of playwrights of colour, emboldened and encouraged black and Asian theatre groups for the remainder of the decade, and indirectly led to the foundation of theatre companies such as Acacia, African Dawn and Wall Theatre. Likewise, Berman's Inter-Action hosted the feminist event *Almost Free*, the first of a series of women's theatre festivals which led to the

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<sup>80</sup> Jim Haynes, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Montparnasse, Paris.



formation of the Women's Theatre Group in 1973, championing work by Wandor and Pam Gems amongst others. In 1975, Berman also presented a season called *Homosexual Acts* which ultimately paved the way for the Gay Sweatshop Theatre Company, established by Gerald Chapman and Drew Griffiths (Itzin, 1980: 234).

Open Space was yet a third alternative venue headed by an American which was to have a significant impact on London's theatrical scene. It was established by the U.S. director Charles Marowitz in collaboration with Thelma Holt. Marowitz had directed several plays at the Traverse between 1963 and 1966, before going on to work with Peter Brook on the *Theatre of Cruelty* season at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) in 1964, where they staged workshop productions with members of the Royal Shakespeare Company and Brook's version of Peter Weiss's play within a play, *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean Paul Marat As Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade* (1964). Later, Howard Barker and Trevor Griffiths were to become resident dramatists at Open Space.

By 1974, perhaps having recognised the value of venues such as the Arts Lab, Inter-Action Trust and Open Space, the critic Lambert paid tribute to this trinity of American trailblazers, Haynes, Berman and Marowitz, claiming they had done more to advance British theatre 'than did many of their fellows in our universities' (Megson, 2012: 82). In light of the decline of the Empire and its impact on British society, a link can be drawn between the American domination of the alternative scene in London and the hesitancy on the part of the theatre establishment to engage with this new form of theatre. Ironically, some anti-American sentiment was perceptible, albeit to a lesser degree, on the British alternative scene which it dominated.

Elyse Dodgson started her lengthy career at the Court in the 1980s and served as its International Director from 1996 until her death in October 2018. Dodgson was originally from New York and came to Britain first in 1966 to study drama at the Guildhall for her

second year of training. Her recollections of the era involve experiencing subtle hostility, suspicion and resentment towards Americans regarding culture, accent, art and politics. There were no other Americans in her year at the Guildhall and she recalls being told not to use any 'American sounds' and that anyone hearing those objectionable 'sounds' should correct her. 'I didn't speak for six months. I stayed a year and then left,' she recalls.<sup>81</sup>

Dodgson returned home to the US and spent time in New York before moving to San Francisco where she took workshops with the San Francisco Mime Troupe Workshop and taught at a Free School, which she clarifies as, 'Free in the hippy sense that kids could do what they wanted'.<sup>82</sup> Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968 prompted Dodgson to leave the USA for good. Returning to London in 1968, she read an advertisement in the *International Times*, the alternative scene's main publication prior to the appearance of *Time Out*. The Brighton Combination were looking for performers to join the company. Dodgson met with Noel Greig, Jenny Harris and Ruth Marks and they offered her a position. She remembers:

Our first production was called *Island of Sugar*, we totally took the text and made it our own. The writer objected and he took out an injunction. We changed the name to the *Rise and Fall of Tony Banana*, and it was performed at the London School of Economics sit-in in 1968.<sup>83</sup>

This flexibility is indicative of the *modus operandi* of the alternative scene and an interesting example of how this scene was unencumbered by traditional approaches and conventional processes. Brenton joined the company shortly afterwards and Brighton Combination produced his play *A Sky Blue Life* (1971) which was based on the life of Gorky. Dodgson recalls that even on the alternative scene with its strong American influences; she had to subvert her natural manner of speaking in order to gain acceptance:

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<sup>81</sup> Elyse Dodgson, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Royal Court Theatre, London.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

I was cast in a part and I remember that they were all worried about me sounding so American, that there were political connotations to my American accent.... There was a lot of anti-American sentiment. I spent hours listening to tapes and practicing trying not to sound American... I had the feeling that they looked down on Americans... There was a book called *The Radical Soap Opera* [by David Zane Mairowitz] and the general theme was that Americans cannot be true radicals as Capitalism was too ingrained. It was written by an American.<sup>84</sup>

Here, Dodgson encounters a combined political and anti-American prejudice. During this era there was much commentary and debate amongst left-wingers regarding authenticity and sincerity of politics. Dodgson recalls: ‘There was a feeling that Americans were playing with left-wing politics, that they were not really genuine. This was surprising to me as I had been involved and had been on so many protests’.<sup>85</sup> It is an attitude which also echoes Lewenstein’s perception of the emergent 1970s writers. Lewenstein saw the Court’s emerging writers as near dilettantes, with their politics superficially tagged on to their work, as will be regarded more closely in Chapter Three.

Not all Americans felt they were discriminated against. Haynes iterates his experiences as different: ‘I never experienced any prejudice for being American. I never modified my accent.’<sup>86</sup> The male experience, and reaction, would differ from that of the female, who would have experienced more discrimination, and would have been more susceptible to social pressure. Also, although Haynes does not feel his nationality was held against him. He does recall that the Court made no attempt to support, acquaint or connect with his highly successful Arts Lab, though he was a frequent audience member at the theatre and had met many key Court figures over the years. Anti-American sentiment quite possibly did exist in London at that time; it was not powerful enough to impede the efforts of Haynes, Marowitz or Berman.

As has been noted in Chapter One, a number of the emergent 1970s playwrights say they were influenced by a succession of alternative American theatre productions which were performed in Britain in the late 1960s. These American theatre companies included

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Jim Haynes, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Montparnasse, Paris.

Ellen Stewart's Café La Mama Experimental Theatre Club and Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre. Both troupes arrived in Britain in 1967 and performed at the Court whilst on national tour. According to Little and McLaughlin, these American companies introduced an 'exuberant, eclectic style of acting and design which was a revelation to the more puritan theatre-makers of the Court' (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 105). Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre followed in 1968, and Living Theatre arrived in 1969 (Findlater, 1981: 93; Megson, 2012: 48). All these companies had an emphasis on the collective, and explored non-verbal, non-scripted performance. In his 1975 commentary *Disrupting the Spectacle*, Ansorge compares these tours and their impact with the visit of Brecht's Berliner Ensemble to London in 1956, and elucidates the manner in which they influenced British troupes such as the Pip Simmons, just as Brecht's company had played a formative role in the careers of key artists at the Court like Devine. The works of Brecht, Ionesco and Beckett did not have the mass appeal or democratic focus of alternative theatre. Their work was not taken to non-traditional loci such as working men's clubs, as alternative theatre was. There was a thrust within alternative theatre to expand its appeal and broaden its audience. The alternative scene was also lateral and its inroads more random in pattern; in a sense, it defied any central control, and as such sits in contrast to the culture and much of the work programmed at the Court at this time.

#### 2.4 British culture focuses on empire era

When Sir Ralph Richardson makes his entrance.. the audience claps for several respectful moments. It seems all too fitting - the knowing star in a well-made hit by our leading dramatist. Who mentioned anger? Who whispers now of dissent?<sup>87</sup>

This comment by the critic Mary Holland references a performance at the Court of Osborne's *West of Suez* (1971) and signifies the Court's apparent lack of rebellious spirit by this time; in its fear of change it was as if the Court had been defanged. Osborne, the original angry young man, also seemed jaded by this time. In 1971, Osborne met Hare for

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<sup>87</sup> Mary Holland, *Plays and Players*, October 1971 issue 19: 38.

the first time to pose for the photograph that heads Chapter One of this thesis. Hare is impressed by the ‘expensively barbered’ Osborne, and says he was ‘in awe, unable to speak’. Osborne’s diary recording of the event is distinctly less upbeat:

‘My days in theatre are over. I would accept that. My 17th year as a professional writer for the theatre. A birthday for me at the Royal Court! What an absurdity. I’m an embarrassment to them and myself’. (Heilpern, *The Guardian*, April 3rd, 2006)<sup>88</sup>

John Osborne was not alone in feeling redundant, marginalised and defeated. The loss of empire had a psychological legacy. This was a country that very recently had to surrender immense global power. Although the social and legal reforms of the sixth decade of that century certainly brought relief on many legal and social fronts, there was a near-palpable lament for the imperial era that was being left behind. In 1965, Winston Churchill died. The war-time leader and scion of the once all-powerful patrician class was buried with the attendant pomp usually reserved for monarchs. The occasion can be viewed as a farewell to Britain’s imperial past, as society all around changed fast.

Yet, the shadow of the imperial past lingered and continued to influence and inform the national psyche throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, in different ways. Gilroy terms to this mid-century interest in empire as a ‘postcolonial melancholia’ (Gilroy, 2005). Gilroy’s work adapts the concept of ‘melancholia’ in the Freudian sense, applying it not to an individual but to society and neo-imperialist politics, positing that ‘when colonial history and memory do manage to interrupt the trancelike moods of contemporary consumer culture, they have usually been whitewashed in order to promote imperialist nostalgia’ (Gilroy, 2005:3). Gilroy contends that melancholic reactions have obstructed the process of working through the legacy of colonialism and he warns against revisionist accounts of imperial and colonial life that act as a salve for the national conscience (ibid). Much of theatre’s focus on the British Empire in the 1960s and early 1970s can be read as guilt-fuelled, and accordingly critical of imperial injustices. Nonetheless, the colonial narrative was evidently a constant and continuous fascination. In his 1987 book, *The Heritage*

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<sup>88</sup> See <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2006/apr/29/theatre.biography> [accessed Feb. 2nd, 2018].

*Industry*, Robert Hewson also noted that the ‘nostalgic impulse is an important agency in adjustment to crisis, it is a social emollient and reinforces national identity when confidence is weakened or threatened’ (Hewison, 1987:47). Initially, nostalgia for empire can be said to have been subconsciously employed to reinforce national confidence in the face of national decline (Poore, 2012: 22-23).

Superficially and aesthetically, consciously and subconsciously, reverberations from the imperial era were evident in British society in various ways during this declinism. The 1950s, for example, are synonymous with the ‘teddy-boy’ look, a phrase derived from ‘Edwardian’, as the attire of ‘teddy-boys’ took its inspiration from the long Edwardian coat suit with its distinctive wide lapels. As John Bull notes, the early 1960s Prime Minister Harold Macmillan had grown up in the Edwardian period and everything about his presence and style proclaimed his allegiance to it (Bull, 2017: 8). Whilst it may not be surprising that an elderly patrician politician would dress in an old-fashioned way, the imperial era was also inspiring the sartorial choices of the youth through the 1960s and early 1970s. The attire of ‘dandys’ of the 1960s included Victorian pea-coats, ruffled shirts, boating blazers and velvet suits (Poore, 2012: 38). Facial hair and longer hair-styles had returned as fashion for men. Acknowledging this trend, Poore adds that, during the 1950s and 1960s, there was also a growing middle-class fondness for art nouveau and Victorian home décor and for preserving and valuing ‘period fireplaces’, brass fittings and stained glass paneling – all synonymous with the empire years and its *Art Nouveau* (ibid).

An Edwardian undercurrent can be further traced in popular culture in the 1960s, exemplified by many of the tunes composed by popular British rock bands of the era, and these music-hall influenced tunes made an interesting obverse to contemporary offerings. The ubiquitous and unprecedentedly popular Beatles provide a catalogue of such music, particularly those composed primarily by Paul McCartney whose tunes including *When I’m Sixty Four*, *Your Mother Should Know*, *Ob-La-Di-Ob-La-Da* and *Maxwell’s Silver Hammer* are often indistinguishable from Edwardian music hall, save for the instrumentation. When, at the height of their global fame in 1967, the band went on extended leave to an ashram in

northern India, the ‘jewel in the crown of the British Empire’, their retreat attracted international press coverage and echoed images of the arrival of the Raj. The youngest Beatle, George Harrison, was particularly influenced by Indian folk music, having studied the sitar with Ravi Shankar, and incorporated its sound in the band’s music – thus returning to Britain with exoticism, much like a Victorian explorer. The Beatles’ contemporaries, The Kinks were a particularly ‘English’ band (perhaps a reason why they failed to ‘conquer America’ unlike their colleagues in the so-called ‘British invasion’ – phrases used by the media at the time which in themselves appear to yearn for a bygone imperial era). The Kinks were at their most English when they were evoking old traditions. As is noted by Poore, their lyrics employed English vernacular slang, recalled village greens, duck ponds and cricket, and both rural English and London city landmarks (Poore, 2012: 39). Examples of their oeuvre from this period include: *Waterloo Sunset* (1967), *Dedicated Follower of Fashion* (1966), *Sunny Afternoon* (1966), *A Well Respected Man* (1965), *Mr. Pleasant* (1966) and *Dandy* are all indicative of this nostalgic, slightly colonial era musical arrangement and lyric (ibid).

Film also began to look to the imperial era for inspiration. The Walt Disney movie version of the P.L. Travers children’s book series *Mary Poppins* was released in 1964. Set in 1910 Edwardian London and starring Julie Andrews and Dick Van Dyke, the film was universally acclaimed and received thirteen Academy Award nominations, winning five. Although American, it was very popular in Britain where the English could lay claim to the story. In 1960, Lionel Bart had stormed the West End with Victorian-era *Oliver!* This work was a musical based on the Dickens’ novel, and together with its 1968 cinematic treatment by David Lean, has been accredited with promoting the preservation and renovation of Victorian architecture in London (Poore, 2012:38). The previous year another film adaptation of a Victorian novel, Thomas Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd* (dir. John Schlesinger), did very well at the British box office, and tellingly, not well on its American release. On the small screen *The Forsyte Saga* was launched in 1967. The series was set during the height of the British Empire and spanned the late Victorian and early Edwardian

periods. It proved enormously popular with viewers. The following year, 1968, saw *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, which was directed by key Court figure Tony Richardson, and *Carry On Up the Khyber*, directed by Gerald Thomas, arrived in British cinemas. Despite the progressive discussion and forward-looking public discussion, there was a discernable and pervasive fascination with the days of empire.

#### **i. British theatres home in on empire**

The Theatre Royal Stratford East presented *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1963), Littlewood's World War I musical satire which was critical of the sacrifice and waste of life war commanded. The play had originated as a radio play by Charles Chiltern and, following Littlewood's production, was later adapted to film by Richard Attenborough. The production contrasted harsh imagery of the trenches projected onto a backdrop, with comedy of the action and the music hall songs favoured by the 'Tommies'. Popular with the public, critical reaction was mixed although Tynan's review of March 24<sup>th</sup> 1963, in the *Observer*, was headlined 'Littlewood Returns in Triumph': 'The proscenium sparkles with fairy lights; and a terrible counterpoint is soon set up between the romanticism of the lyrics, all gaiety and patriotic gusto, and the facts of carnage in France'<sup>89</sup>. Later, Peter Barnes explored and criticised Victorian sexual mores in *The Ruling Class* (1968), which opened at the Nottingham Playhouse before transferring to the Piccadilly Theatre. This work is doubly retrospective because it was not only critical of empire, but also of hierarchies at home in that it critiques the aristocracy. Edward and Charles Wood's empire-critical *H, Being Monologues at Front of Burning Cities* (1969) showed at the National Theatre. Wilson's *Vampire* (1973), produced by Paradise Foundry, features social vampires and feminism from the Victorian age onward, which again strongly hints at a fear of the foreign. Tony Harrison took inspiration from the classics to set a Greek tragedy in Imperial India, *Phaedra*

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<sup>89</sup> Review of the Theatre Royal Stratford East's production of *Oh! What a Lovely War*. Tynan, K. published in the *Observer*, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1963. See <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/jan/31/kenneth-tynan-on-oh-what-a-lovely-war> [accessed February 9th, 2018].



*Britannica* (1975). This phenomenon of a focus on empire can be mapped right through to 1980, with Churchill's *Cloud 9* (1978) and Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* (1980).

As Poore contends, these plays do not comprise an overwhelming body of work, yet their prominence and the importance of the theatres which produced and staged them demonstrate that imperial themes were appealing to leading writers, directors and literary managers of the era (Poore, 2012: 47). The ghost of the British Empire haunted the national psyche and, most pertinently for this chapter, it informed and influenced the British stage in the 1960s and 1970s as the country processed the disappearance of its empire. It is also of particular note that the volume of plays set in the imperial era, and critical of this time – was not equaled by a similar number of plays focusing on the contemporary injustices still being visited on colonised peoples within the British Empire. This fact could suggest that the backwards gaze towards empire, whether nostalgic or critical, was performing a healing function. Looking back was also a distraction from contemporary issues such as the legacy of colonialism and how this was manifesting in the various postcolonial societies.

## **ii. The Court homes in on empire**

At the Court, Osborne's plays display both a preoccupation and an ambiguous attitude towards the British Empire, as will be explored later in this chapter. Ostensibly at least, the thrust was a liberal rejection of imperialism and the atrocities of colonialism. Nonetheless, a disproportionate amount of Court attention was on that lost era, exemplified by work such as Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (1959) – a play which follows deserters in a colonial war. It is anti-imperialist in stance and strongly references and draws parallels with contemporary events in Cyprus. It is typical of a Court empire play inasmuch as it denounces the imperial culture, but all the while gazes at it.

Bond penned a controversial brace of plays which showed at the Court in 1968, the first of which, *Early Morning*, was, as previously mentioned, banned *in toto* by the Lord Chamberlain and was only produced at the Court following the repeal of the *Theatres Act*. A surreal play initially written in 1965, it scandalously portrays Queen Victoria as a murderous lesbian having an affair with Florence Nightingale, her grandsons presented as

conjoined twins. In this fashion, it scorns the great icons of empire. As Bond mockingly prefaces the work with the epitaph ‘the events of this play are true’ (Whybrow, 2001: 315). *Early Morning* was succeeded by Bond’s *Narrow Road to the Deep North* (1968), which premiered that year at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry and was subsequently produced at the Court. Set in Edo-period Japan, this work features Victorian characters and again satirises the British Empire. Bond returned to the Court with *The Sea* (1973), which is based on Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, and is set in an Edwardian-era seaside village in East Anglia; it contemplates the reactions of the locals to the death of a much-loved figure who washes up on the beach, and there is an added a fear of invasion by aliens.

Even if the majority of plays concerning the imperial age were critical of colonialism, it is clear that theatre in the 1960s and 1970s had a keen interest in the imperial era. Whilst the Court management might have believed it right and moral to programme work critical of the imperial century, ironically their focus on the imperial era also meant that there was less room for plays which dealt with the uncomfortable and unpalatable truths about the modern legacy of British colonialism in the contemporary world.

## 2.5 The British class system under threat

The poet Philip Larkin famously celebrated social change in the 1960s in his poem *Annus Mirabilis*:

Sexual intercourse began  
In nineteen sixty-three  
(which was rather late for me) –  
Between the end of the Chatterley ban  
And the Beatles’ first L.P.<sup>90</sup>

Larkin’s popular and oft-repeated reflection on the 1960s signals the accepted wisdom that, in tandem with the demise of its empire, the wind of change blew through British society throughout the 1960s. Indeed, if the alleged social revolution is given a timeframe, the hinge year provided is indeed often 1963 when, along with the lifting of the ban on D.H.

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<sup>90</sup> *Annus Mirabilis* (Larkin P., [1967]1974).

Lawrence's sexually explicit novel *Lady Chatterly's Lover* (1928), and the advent of The Beatles.

As Osborne astutely explores in his plays, the British Empire and the British class system were indivisible, and a danger to empire signified a threat to the class system. Class has long underpinned the machinations of British society, and never more so than during the years of empire. There is an oft-repeated cliché regarding the 1960s that this decade heralded the end of the class system in Britain. There is an impression that the upper classes were disposed during the post-war years, and that it was a bloodless, joyous coup:

No major European aristocracy, except perhaps the British, has voluntarily relinquished power without a social revolution, whether violent and bloody and brief, or commercial and casual and slow. (Sinclair, 1969: 168)

As with the legend of the 'swinging sixties', there undoubtedly is some small element of truth in this interpretation of events. Nonetheless, whatever changes occurred did so gradually and their extent was not as dramatic or as thorough or as swift as this quote suggests. There were undeniable social shifts during this decade. Working-class heroes such as the actors Alan Bates and Terence Stamp, the fashion model Twiggy and a number of British rock bands such as the working-class Liverpudlian group The Beatles, rose to prominence. Together they headed a new youth movement which valued and elevated the culture of the proletariat. Additionally, Osborne and his ilk, the so-called angry-young-men with their gritty realism and working-class, 'kitchen sink' settings were being programmed at the Court, the Theatre Royal Stratford East, and beyond. The *1944 Education Act* had already planted the seeds for a working-class insurgency into the professions. Superficially, this is a narrative that suggests a 'velvet revolution' did indeed occur within British society. It is too tidy a summation and too simplistic an interpretation of a more complex and nuanced situation, however.

The upper classes were disproportionately powerful at the beginning of the 1960s. An indication of how a small elite wielded power internationally during this period, is the fact that Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was related by marriage to the U.S. President,

John F. Kennedy, through his sister's marriage into the British aristocracy.<sup>91</sup> David Ormsby-Gore, Lord Harlech, the British Ambassador in Washington, was similarly related to the U.S. President. It is also useful to note that when Macmillan resigned, he was succeeded by a fellow aristocrat, Sir Alec Douglas-Home.

Macmillan's Conservative government became embattled due to the Profumo Affair. This scandal involved the Secretary of State John Profumo's extra-marital liaisons with a prostitute, Christine Keeler, who was concurrently having an affair with an alleged Soviet agent, Yevgeny Ivanov. The affair began at a louche weekend at Lord Astor's stately home, Cliveden, in 1961 and continued for some months. It was later exposed in 1963 in salacious detail in the press. The prime minister resigned in the wake of this scandal, citing health reasons. This affair dovetailed with an infamous divorce case between the Duke and Duchess of Argyll, the latter accused by her husband of infidelity. The ensuing court case involved a set of sexually explicit photographs of the naked Duchess and an anonymous man engaged in a sexual act, her lover rumored to be equally of high rank. These incidents accelerated a decline in the esteem in which the ruling classes were once held, casting them somewhat as objects of scorn and satire in the public's eye.<sup>92</sup>

There is commentary to suggest that the upper classes felt aggrieved at their loss of autonomy and standing in the early 1960s, even if they had fared better than their continental cousins. As the patrician historian Harold Nicolson wrote regretfully in 1961, 'Today it is as difficult for an aristocrat to enter the foreign service as it would be for a

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<sup>91</sup> Macmillan's wife's nephew, William Cavendish, Marquess of Hartington, had married Kennedy's sister Kathleen.

<sup>92</sup> The occurrence of these scandals coincided with and helped to fuel a boom in satirical comedy during that era, with the upper classes often the target of the derision. The anti-authoritarian stance was very much in vogue in the 1960s. Satire as entertainment was highly popular, exemplified by *That Was The Week That Was*, a highly successful show which broadcast on the BBC in 1962 and 1963 and was hosted by David Frost. It pivoted on the lampooning of authority figures, as it became increasingly fashionable to poke the eye of the establishment. It is noteworthy that leading satirists of the era, including Peter Cook, Richard Ingrams and Willie Rushton, sprung from the same public school and Oxbridge milieu as those whom they satirised. Refracted through these optics, it can be said that the establishment was being teased, and was not under serious threat by the anti-authoritarianism trend of the 1960s. In fact, it became fashionable for members of the establishment to take an anti-authoritarian stance. Peter Cook's Soho nightclub was named, wryly, 'The Establishment'.

camel to pass through the eye of a needle' (Sampson, 1962: 304). The historian David Cannadine points out that, by 1960, only three per cent of the top jobs in the civil service were held by those with landed connections (Cannadine, 1990: 670). He adds that the Foreign Office continued to be criticised for its exclusiveness as too many of its entrants came from Oxbridge.

In subsequent years, this near monopoly by the upper classes on powerful positions did weaken, though aristocrats continued to be disproportionately influential. Almost a decade later, in a revealing incident in the early 1970s, the BBC reporter Sandra Harris asked the romantic novelist and aristocrat Barbara Cartland on the *Today* show if she thought the British class barriers had broken down, to which Cartland replied: 'Of course they have, or I wouldn't be sitting here talking to someone like you'.<sup>93</sup> Cartland's remark, whilst recognising that there had been a shift in class roles, was simultaneously and perhaps defensively putting Harris 'in her place', rather than conceding any true equality.

Whilst the aristocracy may have seen their influence diminish in these years, by the end of the 1960s it was the Oxbridge-educated middle classes who had come to control government, the civil service and media and provided twenty-six of the thirty permanent Secretaries and 250 of the 630 Members of Parliament (Billington, 2012: 196). This new bourgeois elite also formed the vast majority of journalists and therefore had great sway over public opinion. The middle classes were by far the most prevalent class in the arts and theatre in particular, including the upper levels of the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company and at the Court in Sloane Square. Ironically, although the social revolution saw working-class culture being celebrated in the arts, it was the middle classes who had advanced most significantly and were now in charge of programming at theatres.

*The Robbins Report on Higher Education* in 1963 argued that the cause of the post-war economic malaise was rooted in a failure to promote third-level education for those beyond the public school educated, which would include almost all the working classes.

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<sup>93</sup> See Barbara Cartland's obituary, <http://www.economist.com/node/348501> [accessed February 6th, 2018].

Even by the end of the 1960s, and despite forward-looking legal advances regarding divorce, homosexuality and feminism, the social structure had not changed radically, at least not beyond the middle classes. For the working classes, a traditional power framework remained largely in place, with an educated, moneyed class yielding influence over a lower class and the system now worked in favour of the middle class, who, rather than being sent to Kenya and India to middle-manage the empire, were becoming journalists, arts and media industry managers and generally informing the tastes and opinions of British Society, and recording its narrative.

**i. The Court as a middle-class institution**

The Sloane Square theatre was broadly viewed as anti-establishment, an image reinforced by Gaskill's defence of Bond's *Saved*. However, the theatre had been run from its launch in 1956 up until 1972, by figures borne of a solidly middle-class background: Devine and Richardson, Gaskill, Anderson and Page were all white Anglo-Saxon, overwhelmingly privately-schooled, Oxford-educated Protestant English males. The Court was a solidly middle-class institution. Those recruited to work at the Court tended to be of a similar background. As Howarth recalls, having been involved with the Court since 1957:<sup>94</sup>

They just wanted people like themselves around, because then they know who they were dealing with, and what to expect. The Royal Court was anti-authoritarian. They certainly didn't want any Binkie Beaumonts.<sup>95</sup>

The emergent 1970s writers who had gathered around the Court had backgrounds that sat in demonstrable tension with their subject matter. The playwright Gregory Motton has recorded the affluent provenances of these young playwrights, a number of whom had even attended the same private school. Hare had arrived at the Court as Literary Manager on the invitation of Hampton, a fellow pupil at Lancing, an exclusive fee-paying school in Sussex. Hare later went on to attend Cambridge. Edgar is an Oundle old boy who graduated from

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<sup>94</sup> Playwright Howarth's own socio-economic provenance was markedly lower on the scale than his fellow Court figures Gaskill and Richardson, though all three had grown up in Bradford in the West Riding of Yorkshire and had known each other in their teens.

<sup>95</sup> Donald Howarth, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, Sept. 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Lower Mall, Hammersmith, London.

Manchester University. Wilson had attended the private Bradfield School, where his father was headmaster, and then the University of East Anglia. Brenton, whose father was a Methodist preacher, went to Chichester High School, which was not a fee-paying school but a grammar school at that time, and then on to Cambridge. Williams was an old Etonian who had attended Oxford, which was a more typical Court management pedigree.

It is salutary to note that one of the few respects in which this young group differed from the artistic management at the Court up until 1972, was that Devine, Gaskill, Anderson and Page, had all been Oxford graduates, and predominantly Wadham College, whereas the emergent generation of writers were more broadly associated with Cambridge. It is helpful to consider also that the 1960s writers, Bond, Wesker and Storey and to a certain degree Osborne, were also white Englishmen, but hailed from backgrounds further down the socio-economic scale. Therefore, when contrasted with the egalitarian thrust of the alternative scene and therein the impetus to give a voice to the disadvantaged groups, Court support for the emergent 1970s writers such as Hare, Edgar, Wilson, Brenton and Williams would have appears a step backwards rather than forwards. Such an approach ran against the general trend in theatre, at that specific period.

In his autobiography, Hare touches on his background but is coy about his private schooling. He seeks to play down Lancing's exclusivity by stating that his school was in a minor league of fee-paying schools. Fees at Lancing are currently more than £30,000 a year, and as such, it is one of the most expensive private schools in the country. It was specifically through Hare's Lancing network that he had come to the Court. Hare's need to address his background and lessen its elitist status perhaps suggests an awareness that it positioned him at some social variance with the rising voices and themes in alternative theatre. Nonetheless, Hare appeared very much privately educated to some of his contemporaries. As David Gothard, a young Assistant Stage Manager at the Court during these years who later ran Riverside Studios, recalls of the era: 'David Hare was a public

school snob of his kind.<sup>96</sup> This new generation were from a certain school and it was difficult for Lindsay's generation to swallow them'.<sup>97</sup>

An insight into why the emergent 1970s writers may have wanted to distance themselves from their bourgeois roots is provided in Gaskill's memoirs, where the director recounts how, when the Court became associated with working-class 'kitchen sink' plays in the 1950s and 1960s and required actors who could believably portray working-class characters, 'the whole class thing became a joke; actors of good background would come pretending to be from the working class, for the benefit of those directors who would be deceived by them. Their eyes would sparkle and they'd say, "I left school when I was fourteen," and they were lying. They had been to Oxford and Cambridge' (Gaskill in Doty, Harbin, 1990: 38-39). For the emergent 1970s playwrights, a benefit of writing about minority ethnic groups, socialism and feminism, was that it allowed them to align with these minorities and helped to downplay their middle-class identity, as well as drawing a spotlight towards social issues they championed. Notwithstanding their good intentions, the emergent 1970s playwrights were not actually representative of any marginalised group and, as long as the Court provided a platform for these middle-class white male English playwrights, it was denying that same space for playwrights and theatre-makers from less heeded sections of society.

A consideration of the director/playwright alliances at the Court illuminates some class structures at work at the Court. Throughout the 1960s, the Oxfordian management /directors such as Devine, Gaskill and Anderson each championed a specific playwright, respectively: Osborne, Bond and Storey (Devine, H. 2006: 168; Browne, T. 1975: 97; Doty, Harbin, 1990: 152). As mentioned, the playwrights Bond and Wesker, and to a slightly lesser extent Storey, were all from working-class backgrounds. Therefore, in each pairing, the director was middle class and the playwright working class, which would have produced

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<sup>96</sup> The term 'public school' is used in this study in accordance with the British meaning: an independent, private school for which parents have to pay. Public schools are often, but not always, boarding schools.

<sup>97</sup> David Gothard, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Pimlico, London.



its own dynamic and one which could not have been replicated with the emergent 1970s playwrights who were overwhelmingly middle class themselves. As Gaskill noted: ‘The class background of these new writers was not in the cosmology we had known when the Court started. Unlike earlier Court writers, they were public-school boys’ (Gaskill, 1988: 127).

## ii. The working class at the Court

Despite the ostensible trendiness of working-class culture and the discourse regarding the end of the class system, an elitist social structure had not been eradicated. Indeed, in the 1960s, many of the figures celebrated in British society as ‘working-class heroes’, did not truly emerge from that demographic.<sup>98</sup> The working class are traditionally understood to be those who work with their hands, often as labourers or manual workers, who are paid weekly wages, as opposed to monthly salaries. Most typically in mid-twentieth century Britain, a working-class family would live in council housing and the children would be state school educated.

Not all Court figures who have been labelled working-class, could be easily identified as such. The perception of Osborne as working-class, for example, has been challenged by Chambers and Prior who claim that *Look Back in Anger* demonstrates, ‘Osborne had not the slightest understanding of working-class life’ (Chambers, Prior, 1987: 36). Osborne had indeed been privately educated, albeit at one of the more affordable boarding schools. This is not to suggest that there was no social mobility throughout the 1960s but it was less radical than has been suggested or recalled, and many members of the ‘working class’ who advanced at this time, ironically did so because they benefitted from the educational advantages of their lower middle-class background. The new model mimicked the age-old structure, and it was the middle classes rather than the working classes who benefitted from the social and class shifts of the 1960s.

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<sup>98</sup> A phrase popularised by the John Lennon song, *Working Class Hero*. Lennon was also, like Osborne, lower middle class. Lennon was raised in Woolton, a bourgeois suburb of Liverpool, by a maternal aunt whose husband owned a dairy. He attended a grammar school and later Liverpool Art School.

There has been critical commentary on the Court's engagement with and representation of the working classes, with some critics accusing the institution of using the working classes for entertainment. The Sloane Square theatre was particularly censured by playwright, theatre-maker and chronicler of the 1970s era John McGrath, for encouraging middle-class writers to produce plays exploring the social world of the working classes in a manner he felt leaned towards voyeurism:

[The Court's] greatest claim to social significance is that it produced a new 'working-class' art, that it somehow stormed the Winter Palace of bourgeois culture and threw out the old regime and turned the place into a temple of workers' art. Of course it did nothing of the kind. What Osborne and his clever director Tony Richardson achieved was a method of translating some areas of non-middle-class life in Britain into a form of entertainment that could be sold to the middle classes. (McGrath, 1981: 10)

McGrath's accusation of voyeurism is akin to criticism of contemporary reality T.V. shows which document the people on social welfare benefits, criticised as 'poverty porn' in the press and social media and articles such as Matthew Flinders' 'Down and Out in Bloemfontein' published on the *Oxford University Press Blog*, January 2014.<sup>99</sup>

McGrath contends that the Court was a middle-class institution which presented the proletariat as 'remote but thrilling' entertainment for bourgeois theatre-goers in London. He claims the language of the Court was that of 'a small metropolitan cultural group with developing but essentially bourgeois values' (McGrath, 1981: 17). McGrath took particular, if idiosyncratic, exception to the staging of David Storey's *The Contractor* (1970), a play in which a marquee was erected and dismantled on the Court's stage. It is this action McGrath particularly views as the embodiment of working-class 'labour-as-entertainment' for the London middle classes. His opinion is later echoed by Howard Barker: although a white Englishman he was one of the few emergent 1970s playwrights associated with the Court who had not attended a private school and his provenance was lower down the social scale than his privately educated Court associates. Barker referred to the Court's relationship with the working classes in the early 1970s as parasitical: 'I experience this nausea in the sheer

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<sup>99</sup> <https://blog.oup.com/2014/01/bloemfontein-poverty-porn-slum-tourism-2014/>

amount of propaganda that the place was issuing out, in the name of the working class with whom the directors had no relationship whatsoever' (Browne, M. 2011: 197). It is revealing, nonetheless, that Barker directs his ire towards the directors, and not his fellow emergent writers, who arguably had an equally tenuous relationship with the working classes.

## 2.6 Racial tensions in British society

A further legacy of empire was immigration, with an influx of people from former colonies arriving in Britain, such as the 'Windrush Generation' from Jamaica. Immigration was particularly strong in the postwar years when the country needed to be rebuilt and immigrants were frequently promised a bright future in exchange for their labour. There was some hostility and resistance to their arrival which may be attributed to fear of the foreign and a nervousness regarding the shift towards a multi-cultural society. That these anachronistic attitudes towards the foreign persisted, could also be construed as a symptom of a residual antagonism about empire, and its loss, rather than racism alone – though racism surely played a role. By the end of the 1950s, a relocation to Britain of various ethnic groups from its former colonies had begun. This immigration of largely non-white peoples occasionally elicited resentment from the native populace, and even outright racism.<sup>100</sup> These attitudes are violently exemplified by the Notting Hill race riots of 1958.

The new migrants came very largely from Africa, the Caribbean, India and Pakistan, joining the older migrants from Ireland. The racism and xenophobia they sometimes encountered is exemplified by the metonym of the 'No Blacks, No Irish, No Dogs' signs landlords of the period advertised without qualm in the early 1960s, or even the (unsanctioned) Conservative election slogan of one prospective MP, 'If you want a nigger

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<sup>100</sup> Racist attitudes were given further ballast and a disconcerting degree of respectability when the Conservative politician Enoch Powell addressed the General Meeting of the West Midlands Conservative Political Centre, on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1968, with anti-immigration rhetoric which became known as the 'Rivers of Blood' speech (a title derived from the speech's allusion to a line from Virgil's *Aeneid* (Heffer, 2008: 451)). The incident ignited a political storm and Powell was subsequently expelled from the Shadow Cabinet by the Conservative leader, Edward Heath. It is important to note that Heath's lack of support for Powell displays a consensus of distaste for his views within the political establishment.

for a neighbour, vote Labour'.<sup>101</sup> Donald Howarth's personal archive contains a revealing example of attitudes of the time. In a reply he received from the marmalade manufacturers Robertson's in September 1965 in relation to a complaint Howarth had made about the company's use of their 'golliwog' emblem, they write:

We must advise you that we think you are the sole objector to this trademark. The golliwog originated with us as a doll and it is still sold freely in the toy shops. Our trademark has no connection whatsoever with the nigger coon to which you refer. As regards its popularity, it may surprise you to learn that we receive nearly 12,000 applications per week for the golliwog brooches. Within the last year or two we have launched a series of golliwog model musicians and the demand for these is now reaching well over 3,000 a week. We shall in fact before Christmas have distributed over five million golliwog broaches since the end of the war, and the demand grows daily. The golliwog is inevitably connected by all the consuming public with Robertson's products, is a wonderful trademark and one we can assure you we are never likely to discontinue.<sup>102</sup>

Robertson's end the letter by stating they enclose 'some novelties which may be of interest to some children of your acquaintance'; Howarth recalls these items were 'golliwog' badges. There is a tone of some consternation in Robertson's reply, an implication that Howarth was being unreasonable for objecting to the branding. The free use of what are now considered deeply offensive and racist terms 'nigger' and 'coon' in this letter and, presumably, in Howarth's initial complaint albeit used to illustrate the racist nature of the emblem, demonstrates the level of acceptance of such language in 1965. The first *Race Relations Act* (1965), declared racial discrimination illegal (Clarke, 1996: 321-329).

When the Conservatives were returned to power on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1970, some commentators believed their surprise victory might have been due in part to Enoch Powell's hard stance on immigration, speculating that a section of the white population may have been reassured by the Conservative manifesto of 1970 which promised to ensure that immigration would occur only in specifically-defined special cases and that a Conservative government would resist large permanent immigration (Heffer, 2008: 568). In 1971, the

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<sup>101</sup> See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/15/britains-most-racist-election-smethwick-50-years-on> [accessed on December 30th, 2017]

<sup>102</sup> Reply from James Robertson & Sons Ltd to Howarth, dated Sept. 17<sup>th</sup> 1965. Donald Howarth's personal archive, Lower Mall, Hammersmith. Robertson & Sons Ltd discontinued the 'golliwog' branding in 2002.

Tories introduced the *Immigration Act* with its controversial partiality clause which effectively denied Black and Asian Commonwealth citizens the right to settle in Britain whilst granting their white counterparts British citizenship (Solomos: 55-56).<sup>103</sup> It would appear that a further uncomfortable legacy of empire was an imperialist-era racism which fed an ongoing hostility and prejudice against ethnic groups once colonised by the British. This attitude was linked to a fear of reverse colonisation stoked by Powell when he ended his 'Rivers of Blood' speech by predicting: 'In this country in 15 or 20 years' time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man' (Heffer, 2008: 451).

i. **The Court's poor support for black writing in the 1960s**

It was during this era of growing racial tension in Britain of the 1960s, against a background of the country's insecurity and defensiveness regarding its declining cultural and political influence, that the Court reduced its number of plays by non-white or non-British playwrights. This fall was in spite of the rise of black writing on the wider theatrical landscape and a related growth in and awareness of gay theatre, feminist theatre and subaltern or identity theatre emerging from other unprivileged sections of society. There is no scholarship regarding why a progressive theatre such as the Court was slow in supporting or reflecting this latest theatre trend, and in fact was moving in the opposite direction at this point.

The Court's tardiness in supporting minority identity theatre in the 1960s into the early 1970s in comparison to other theatres such as the Theatre Royal Stratford East, sits in contrast to its own programme of the late 1950s. In that earlier period, the Court had become the first theatre in London to recognise that society was becoming multi-cultural. Sloane Square programmed two plays by Black writers, Errol John's *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* (1957) and Barry Reckord's *Flesh to a Tiger* (1958), which had come to the Court's attention via a playwriting competition in the *Observer*. The Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka was also given a Sunday night without *décor* production of his play *The Invention*

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<sup>103</sup> The National Front was founded in 1967 by A.K. Chesterton, and achieved a membership of 17,000 by 1972 (Megson, 2012: 6).

in 1959. In this regard, the theatre was, initially at least, demonstrably alert in recognising social change and multi-culturalism, particularly as both these works were programmed around the time of the Notting Hill riots and the heightened interracial tensions these events unleashed. In 1963, the Court programmed Jean Genet's whiteface play, *The Blacks* (1961). Thereafter almost a decade, the support for, or at least the staging of works, by non-white playwrights disappeared from the Court's programme. This peculiar fact runs contrary to broad trends in theatre in the 1960s and may be explained by an increasingly defensive and inward looking culture at the Court and a rising generation of playwrights that were likewise unwilling to share their platform with people from the former colonies, preferring to write the plays that chronicle the subaltern experience themselves.

When highlighting the difference between a playwright from a subaltern group writing from their own perspective and true-life experience, and comparing it to a narrative provided by an outsider, however well-meaning, it is useful to consider Shepherd-Barr's examination of how African-American writer Lorraine Hansberry responded to Genet's play *The Blacks* (1959), which the Court programmed in the early 1960s. Hansberry felt that Genet's absurdism obscured the real issues in his drama and that he romanticised and exoticised Africans. At the start of Genet's play, he explains in a note that the play is intended for a white audience, but if it is ever performed before a black audience, then a white person, male or female, should be invited every evening, welcomed formally by the director and seated in the front row centre with the 'spotlight' focused upon this symbolic white person throughout the performance. If no white person agreed to do that, 'then let white masks be distributed to the black spectators as they enter the theatre'. Shepherd-Barr records how Hansberry rejected this approach as indirect and therefore lacking impact. Hansberry's play in response, *Les Blancs* (1970), which was finished posthumously by Hansberry's husband, opens with a tableau and soundscape powerfully evoking the African bush and showing a black woman warrior triumphantly pulling an enormous spear from the earth and brandishing it above her head (Shepherd-Barr, 2016: 100). Although this staging could potentially be accused of equally exoticising Africans, it was nonetheless a play that

forced the audience to consider this demographic group, rather than their own reaction to them. In doing so, Hansberry's play confronts the postcolonial culture by transplanting the American situation into an African setting and exploring the struggle between the indigenous peoples and colonisers. It is a powerful approach because it asks the audience to see the situation from the point of view of an African, rather than requiring them to consider the colonial experience in a more abstract, indirect way.

By the end of the 1960s, the Court had formed a poor record in terms of the programming of plays by non-white playwrights. Of the 336 productions in programme lists for the Court between its launch in 1956 and 1972, only 19 were penned by non-white playwrights, or 5.6% of the overall programme. Of the 193 shows that were billed on the main stage, seven, or 3.6%, were written by non-white playwrights. These statistics will be viewed more closely in Chapter Three. Thus, there is a baffling correlation between a rise in the profile and influence of black writing in theatre, and the Court's decline in impetus to provide a platform to the black voice. The Court at this time also displays something of reluctance to programme other forms of minority identity theatre including feminist and gay identity theatre. It is a paradox at a time when alternative theatre was doing the obverse.

## ii. **Subaltern theatre and the Court, via the theories of Foucault**

Foucault's theories on culture and dominant groups describe culture as a complex set of social structures, or 'a hierarchical organisation of values, accessible to everybody, but at the same time the occasion of a mechanism of selection and exclusion' (Foucault, 1980: 98). Foucault theorises that a dominant culture, the elite group, establishes the cultural norm by transmitting their beliefs, habits and worldview through hegemonic discourses which marginalise and can even exclude less-powerful groups. In his paper 'The Order of Discourse', Foucault states:

In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events. (Foucault, 1970: 52)

Foucault further views power as a ‘certain type of relation between individuals’ that has to do with strategic social positions regarding a subject's control over its environment, and its influence on others (Foucault, 1979: 253). To Foucault, cultural domination was a power struggle, most often pursued by politics and persuasion rather than physical force. Using Foucault’s understanding of the dynamics and outcomes of power struggle, the decline of the British Empire and the nervousness and insecurity it prompted within the British establishment and cultural institutions can be viewed as defensive. Whilst there was no real fear of British culture being eradicated *per se*, having once subverted the cultures of colonised countries and peoples, the knowledge of what can happen when a foreign culture becomes dominant over one’s own may have stoked a worry that British culture was now in danger of being similarly undermined, distorted and displaced.

The decision making and programming by successive artistic managements at the Court during the 1960s and early 1970s, can likewise be interpreted as overly focused on a more powerful era. Drawing on theories of Bourdieu and Foucault, a power structure can be perceived at the Court, one rooted in imperial values and one which was becoming increasingly defensive.

## 2.8 A close consideration of Osborne’s ‘empire plays’ at the Court

The music hall is dying, and with it, a significant part of England. Some of the heart of England has gone; something that once belonged to everyone, for this was truly a folk art.<sup>104</sup>

As has been established, from its launch up until the early 1970s, the Court’s programme demonstrates a preoccupation with ‘empire theatre’. Osborne, the playwright with the strongest association with the Court, wrote at least three plays which specifically dealt with the British Empire or its legacies and associations, most notably music hall. *Look Back in Anger* (1956) has in fact long been viewed in scholarship as a lament for the Edwardian era.

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<sup>104</sup> John Osborne, 1957 in Trussler, 1969, p. 57.



Much of main character Jimmy Porter's anger is directed at a perceived feebleness that he believes has crept into British culture. Rebellato's study of the play and its impact notes that *Look Back in Anger* demonstrates, 'the revitalisation of the theatre, the way it came to be seen as expressing "once again" a certain Britishness... [which] may be seen as [a] reaction to a widespread queering of the theatre in the 1940s and 1950s' (Rebellato, 1999: 222).

After the unanticipated and significant success of his debut play, Osborne followed with three more plays at the Court which engaged with the British Empire, both directly and indirectly. Spanning a period of fourteen years, they are: *The Entertainer* (1957), *A Patriot for Me* (1965) and *West of Suez* (1971). Each of these texts is also linked to a specific milestone in Court history. All three document Osborne's relationship with the imperial age and his shifting views on the modern world and liberal politics, most specifically his opposition to the Suez Crisis in *The Entertainer* (1957) and his disapproval of how a society is run following its independence from British colonial rule in *West of Suez* (1971). The importance of *Look Back in Anger* (1956) is acknowledged but not challenged in this study as Osborne's consideration of empire in that particular work has already been interrogated widely in scholarship (Rebellato, 1999). Building on Rebellato's research, this study concerns how the plays the Court programmed over these fifteen years reflect the Court's relationship with and reaction to the decline of the British Empire.

#### **i. Mapping commentary on empire in *The Entertainer***

In his book *The 101 Greatest Plays: From Antiquity to the Present*, Michael Billington selects *The Entertainer* over its more celebrated predecessor, *Look Back in Anger*, as he considers that the former offers a more resonant metaphor, and one which 'encapsulates the rancorous mood of the 1950s' (Billington, 2016: 360). Osborne's second play, is a state-of-the-nation drama which can also be viewed as a 'state-of-the-empire' play and once more reveals a Court focus on the imperial age. *The Entertainer* sutures the decline of the British Empire and the fading of the music hall tradition. Although Osborne wrote *The Entertainer* in 1957, he set the narrative a year earlier in 1956, and the play's temporal location is significant: 1956 had been a tumultuous year politically.

The mid-to-late 1950s was a moment in British history when much of the old order was crumbling and the new had not quite arrived, but it was on the horizon. Osborne astutely understood that the music hall tradition had a trajectory which ran in near tandem to that of the British Empire and by 1956 both were slouching towards their end and ceding to a more energetic American influence. *The Entertainer* reflects a zeitgeist of demise and eclipse. It was produced in the wake of the Suez Crisis and the resignation of the Prime Minister Anthony Eden. In this regard, Osborne's play served to underscore the fact that the British Empire was waning. In cultural terms, the UK's gaze, and particularly that of the younger generation, was shifting markedly towards America, with that country's prevalence of exciting and youth-focused rock n'roll music and Hollywood movies. British home-grown entertainment mainstays such as the music hall were fading fast. In 1960, Moss Empires, the largest British music hall chain, closed the majority of its venues. It is revealing that the emblem of both music hall and empire: Britannia with bulldog and trident, is, according to Osborne's stage directions, visibly in the forefront of *The Entertainer*, placed on the gauze or the front cloth as Archie Rice performs. This is fitting and authentic as this symbol of empire was a front-cloth frequently used in music hall (Osborne, 1998: 55). Osborne understood that the empire and the music hall had had a symbiotic relationship: the empire supported the music hall and in turn a key music hall function was to celebrate and promote imperialism and patriotism with the masses. Refracted through the prism of postcolonialism, even the nomenclature of music hall venues recalls British imperialism, for example: The Liverpool Empire, The Chiswick Empire and The Glasgow Empire.<sup>105</sup> Empire and music hall were therefore enmeshed, and accordingly by the 1950s both were commonly enduring a decline.

Music Hall, similarly to the American Vaudeville, ran a varied repertoire of comedy and song. In its later and more desperate incarnation, it included female impersonators, risqué dance, nude revues, acrobats and magicians. These shows catered largely, but not

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<sup>105</sup> It should be acknowledged here that there is an echo of imperialism evinced in the name 'Royal Court'.

exclusively, for the lower-middle and working classes, as is suggested in popular music hall songs which spoke to lower class experiences: ‘My Old Man Said Follow the Van’, ‘Knees Up Mother Brown’ and similar popular songs. Music hall provided light and low-brow entertainment for the masses.

Music hall had emerged in Britain as an entertainment force in the early to mid-nineteenth century. So popular did this form of variety performance prove that in some instances public houses were razed to erect music halls. As a venue, a music hall differed from a conventional theatre in that consummation of food and drink during performance was encouraged – they were initially song and supper houses. It was in this Victorian age that a strong partnership emerged between theatre and empire. Quoting J.S. Bratton, Benjamin Poore notes in his book *Theatre and Empire*:

While there were many popular plays in the Victorian period that attempted to portray the complexities of particular imperial conflicts, there were also hundreds of spectacular melodramas on military or imperial themes, ‘ending on a patriotic display of flags and cannon to the tune of ‘rule Britannia’. There were theatres that specialised in nautical and military spectacles like the Surrey, Astely and Sadler’s Wells, and panoramas, dioramas and cosmoramas on imperial themes. (Bratton, 1991: 22)

World War I witnessed the peak of music hall popularity as it brandished and popularised a repertoire of jingoistic and rousing propaganda songs such as ‘It’s a Long Way to Tipperary’ and ‘Pack up Your Troubles’, which in turn provided a ballast to recruitment drives. Peacetime, and the advent of cinema, radio and jazz began to supercede music hall as popular entertainment. Licensing laws, a precursor to Health and Safety restrictions of the modern era, banned the consumption of food and alcohol and hastened the music hall’s decline. By the 1950s, these remnants of the days of empire were fading and closing fast. Initially, rock n’roll bands began to headline at these venues; however, their presence and the music’s American provenance was resented by the old guard. Osborne’s direction in *The Entertainer*’s set design is indicative of this attitude:

Music. The latest, the loudest, the worst. A gauze front-cloth. On it are painted enormous naked young ladies, waving brightly coloured fans, and kicking out gaily. Written across it in large letters are the words ‘ROCK’N ROLL NEW’D LOOK’. (Osborne, 1998: 8)

It is revealing that Osborne's word play here puns 'nude' and 'new'd', implicitly suggesting a vulgarity regarding new trends, and by extension, American music. It is also evidence of Osborne and the Court projecting an image of resistance to new American trends.

At this juncture, it is enlightening to examine the near-exact timeline for both music hall and empire. This study offers an understanding of the relationship between the two. The last period of British Empire (1815-1914) is often referred to by historians as Britain's 'imperial century' (Smith, 2010: 71). Osborne recalls the inspiration for *The Entertainer*:

One evening in the autumn of 1956, I went on my own to the Chelsea Palace. Max Miller was on the bill. Waiting for him to come on, I watched an act, the highlight of which was an impersonation of Charles Laughton playing Quasimodo. I had seen it before. A smoky green light swirled over the stage and an awesome banality prevailed for some theatrical seconds, the drama and poetry, the belt and braces of music-hall holding up epic. (Osborne, 1998: vii)

Thus, the play was borne of a pang of nostalgia for a bygone era and music hall, a British institution wedded to empire. It is ambiguous in its attitude towards the empire, with Osborne fairly showcasing a variety of perceptions via its cast of characters.

In *The Entertainer*, the changing face of the nation is represented by the three generations of the Rice family, a convincing unit with their generations contrasting and disagreeing yet rubbing along as best they can. The ambassador for the older generation is grandfather Billy, the dapper, benevolent Edwardian who represents the values of empire, though he has acquiesced to the turn of the tide. Granddaughter Jean leans towards the new liberal politics, albeit without marked enthusiasm. She protests against the Suez intervention joining the Trafalgar Square demonstrations, while her younger brother Mick is fighting at Suez. Another brother, Frank, also displays the advancing liberal politics of the day as he is a pacifist and a conscientious objector. It is the middle-aged father, Archie Rice, caught between both generations, who is unable to let go of the past or embrace the new. Instead, he lives for his moment in the spotlight, in his 'little round world of light' (Osborne, 1998: 82). Osborne also highlights the selfish individualism of the time via the emotionally detached, solipsistic Archie (Billington, 1998: 361). These depictions hint at an ambiguity towards empire; there is clear sympathy and respect for the older man of the colonial era,

Billy, but also an acceptance that his time is over. There is lack of enthusiasm regarding the new trends, nonetheless.

The character of Billy is largely sympathetically drawn and echoes to some degree Osborne's earlier creation of Colonel Redfern in *Look Back in Anger*. Though he uses bigoted language – 'Bloody Poles and Irish' – his age somewhat forgives him these outbursts and attitudes (Osborne, 1998: 9). The playwright goes into detail regarding Billy's old fashioned appearance and the speech patterns of Billy's generation. His description of the old man evinces a warm, indulgent and admiring attitude from Osborne:

Billy Rice is a spruce man in his seventies. He has great physical pride, the result of a life-time of being admired as a 'fine-figure of a man'. He is slim, upright, athletic. He glows with scrubbed well-being. His hair is just grey, thick and silky from its vigorous daily brush. His clothes are probably twenty five years old – including his pointed patent leather shoes – but well-pressed and smart. His watch chain gleams, his collar is fixed with a tie-pin beneath the tightly knotted black tie, his brown homburg is worn at a very slight angle. When he speaks it is with a dignified Edwardian diction – a kind of repudiation of both Oxford and cockney that still rhymes 'Cross' with 'force', and yet manages to avoid being exactly upper class or effete. Indeed, it is not an accent of class but of period. (Osborne, 1998: 8)

There is no critical judgement here; Osborne vaunts the Edwardian. In his memoir, *A Better Class of Person*, Osborne says Billy Rice is a part-description of his own grandfather:

Grandpa Grove certainly had his own style, but unlike Billy Rice he could not be regarded as having been a star, except in a very small way at the height of his career as a publican, when there were hansom cabs, cigars and his famous breakfast which was said to have consisted of half a bottle of 3-star brandy, a pound of porterhouse steak, oysters in season and a couple of chorus girls all year round. (Osborne, 1981: 23)

It is difficult not to draw comparisons between his regard for his own Edwardian grandfather and the relationship between Billy and Jean, the ambassador for the younger generation who is fond of her grandfather. Though Osborne rejected his mother, he was enthralled by the culture and manners of his grandparents, which goes someway to explaining this rebel's ambiguity when it came to empire. In the Osborne biography, *John Osborne: A Patriot For Us* by John Heilpern, the author considers the playwright's relationship with his elders:

As a boy, Osborne sought out the company of people like his grandma and all the great-uncles and great-aunts. He found them interesting (and he was a good

listener). 'There was no cachet in youth at that time', he noted. 'One was merely a failed adult' (Heilpern, 2006: 27).

Billy's commentary feels deeply authentic, sporting all the chauvinism of his generation, of possibly all older generations who believe the Britain of their youth was the better period.

Yet it is more nostalgic and acquiescent, than raging and aggressive, traits common to Osborne heroes:

BILLY: We all had our own style, our own songs – and we were all English. What's more, we spoke English. It was different. We all knew what the rules were. We knew what the rules were, and even if we spent half our time making people laugh at 'em, we never seriously suggested that anyone should break them. A real pro is a real man, all he needs is an old backcloth behind him and he can hold them on his own for half an hour. He's like the general run of people, only he's a lot more like them than they are themselves, if you understand me. (Osborne, 1998: 75-76)

Here Billy bemoans the passing of the England he knew, yet accepts that it has gone. *The Entertainer* is not a play which pits a younger generation against an older one: Osborne has Jean defer to Billy; she is protective of him. Defending her grandfather against her father's music hall plans, she protests:

He's the only one of us who has any dignity or respect for himself, he's the only one of us who has anything at all and you're going to murder him, you're going to take him down to – who is it – Rubens and Klein tomorrow morning at twelve thirty, and you're going to let Mr. Rubens and Mr Klein sign his death certificate. What are you letting yourself in for now, how on earth did you ever get him to do such a thing? What's happened to him? What's happened to his self-preservation? (Osborne, 1998: 76)

Jean and Billy are generationally and politically polar, yet Osborne furnishes them with a warm supportive bond and both are drawn sympathetically, which to some degree demonstrates Osborne's own political ambiguity. Osborne realises that empire has gone, yet he retains a lingering nostalgia for what he perceives as its style, elegance and class. It seems that Billy's gentle criticism of the new generation is sympathy for a youth so misguided:

I feel sorry for you people. You don't know what it's really like. You haven't lived, most of you. You've never known what it was like, you're all miserable really. You don't know what life can be like. (Osborne, 1998:18)

When Billy dies, his death is indicative of the death of empire. There is an inevitability about his passing. It is a sad moment, but the show goes on nonetheless.

Archie Rice is the key figure in the play, and he is more typical of an Osborne hero and, as such, he is also to some degree the villain of the piece. Archie is complex; he is selfish: 'Number one's the only number one for me,' he sings (Osborne, 1998: 27). He delivers misogynistic, homophobic commentary but that was not unusual for the era, and likely did not offend the audience of the time to the extent it would now. Archie is boastful of his tax-dodging. He is a philanderer, a schemer, an 'entertainer' of questionable talent who acknowledges to his daughter that he is empty: 'Old Archie, dead behind the eyes' (Osborne 1998: 67). He treats his alcoholic wife, Phoebe, in a cavalier manner, is unfaithful and carelessly seduces a woman young enough to be his daughter. Ultimately, it is Archie who encourages his ailing father to return to the stage, a move that consequently prompts the old man's death. Yet, Osborne provides Archie with compassion, a hero aspect. Archie Rice has the backbone to consistently face unmoved audiences and he draws a begrudging admiration because of his endurance and tenacity. He recognises that his life, and England as he knew it, are sinking and he wishes to remain on the ship as it goes down. Such belligerence is designed to elicit respect from the audience.

Archie is also an artist, he can see and appreciate talent and beauty. This ability is demonstrated in a particularly moving moment in the play when, upon hearing of his son Mick's death in the Suez conflict, a stricken Archie recalls a black American lady singing the blues defiantly in a bar: 'God, I could feel like that old black bitch with her fat cheeks, and sing. If I'd done one thing as good as that in my whole life, I'd have been alright' (Osborne, 1998: 65). Osborne later recalled a rehearsal for this scene in which Olivier as Archie attempts to sing a blues song before crumpling in grief for his dead son: 'A dozen of us watched, astounded. Vivien turned her head towards me. She was weeping' (Osborne, 1998: xii).

Archie, the character most determined to keep the music hall going, is focused on the *status quo*. He dislikes change and rages against it, whilst knowing it is pointless to do so. Archie is an admirer of the newly-resigned Prime Minister Anthony Eden. He chides his daughter on her activism:

Oh, really? Are you one of those who don't like the Prime Minister? I think I've grown rather fond of him. I think it was after he went to the West Indies to get Noel Coward to write a play for him. Still, perhaps only someone from my generation could understand that. Does he bring you out in spots? (Osborne, 1998: 34)

The reference to the play by Noël Coward regarding Eden particularly struck Billington, as he sees this reference as proof that Osborne instinctively recognised the theatricality of the Suez Crisis and Eden's fading matinee idol qualities, the theatrical dimension to the times, and the street performance aspect of the Trafalgar Square protests (Billington, 1998: 361).<sup>106</sup>

*The Entertainer* is set against the Suez Crisis. As distant from England though the Sinai Desert military crisis was, it is closely interwoven with this very English story. The unseen son, Mick, goes to the Canal Zone to fight and is captured and ultimately killed. Billington, reflecting on the play, recalls his own experience of the passion aroused by the Suez debacle. He remembers witnessing, on the one hand, a kind of gung-ho saloon bar imperialist nostalgia and, on the other, a liberal revulsion over Britain's breach of international law. It was an outrage which culminated in the Trafalgar Square demonstrations, which the character of Jean Rice attends in the play. The Suez Crisis appeared to be Britain's last, imperial battle and it was a battle lost. Archie's third song 'Thank God I'm Normal', links male potency and the imperialist, in a manner that anticipates Churchill's *Cloud 9*. *The Entertainer* can be seen as a play that reflects a reluctant acceptance that Britain's imperial age has passed, and that a new, modern if flawed time must succeed. Therefore, *The Entertainer* can be viewed as an empire play, or a work with an empire focus. Court director Richardson filmed a movie version in 1960, with a screenplay adapted from the play by Osborne and Nigel Kneale.

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<sup>106</sup> The Suez Crisis was a broadly unpopular military intervention which was ignited when the Egyptian leader Colonel Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal company. Britain was a shareholder in the company and Nasser had acted illegally, according to British law. The consequence was that the British and French, who had previously controlled the canal, supported Israeli forces, headed by Colonel Ariel Sharon, to attack Egypt, while Britain and France carried out their own military manoeuvres, including bombing Cairo. This intervention proved divisive at home and internationally. Ultimately, British troops were forced to withdraw by the UN in favour of a peacekeeping force. It was perceived broadly as a final aggressive act of colonisation by European powers on their former empires.



## ii. Mapping empire commentary in *A Patriot for Me*

Osborne's third play at the Court, *A Patriot for Me* (1965), also has an imperial setting and spans the twenty years in the run up to World War I; however, it is set in the Austro-Hungarian Empire rather than the British. It is best known as a play which broached the subject of homosexuality at a time when homosexual acts were illegal and homosexuality was to some extent socially unacceptable.<sup>107</sup> The subject matter was sufficiently controversial to have made the casting of the play difficult. As the set designer Jocelyn Herbert recalls in Cathy Courtney's book on her work:

Tony Page and I went over to Vienna with the actor playing Redl, Maximilian Schell. We used to go to the opera and then to a nightclub and see all the young men with ancient ladies and the old men with beautiful girls all dressed up to the nines. Tony and I used to sit trying to persuade Schell that Redl's homosexuality was really important because he didn't think that it was, and was afraid of it. Until George Devine agreed to play the part of the Drag Queen (which John Osborne had written for him) no-one would do the play because of its homosexuality. (Herbert in Courtney, 1993: 75)

*A Patriot for Me* draws on the true story of Alfred Redl, a young, able and ambitious officer of the Imperial and Royal Army of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, who was blackmailed into becoming a spy for Tsarist Russia on threat of exposure of his homosexual activities. Despite his relatively lowly Galician origins, Redl had risen to become chief of counterintelligence in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the revelation of his treachery caused tremors at the foundations of the fragile multi-cultural and cross-national Habsburg territories.<sup>108</sup>

*A Patriot for Me* also explores paranoia regarding infiltration by foreign agents,

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<sup>107</sup> The majority of Court management was homosexual and considering social and erstwhile legal views on homosexuality, this may have contributed to a hesitancy or nervousness regarding homosexual content in a play. Stafford-Clark recalls a meeting with Court management when directing Hare's *Slag* (1970): '[Attending were] Lindsay Anderson, Peter Gill, Anthony Page and Bill Gaskill and we were discussing the poster for which a set of ceramic breasts was proposed. As the only non-homosexual in the room, they all were keen to know what I thought of these breasts, as they probably hadn't seen a pair of breasts in forty years or so'. Max Stafford-Clark, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Out of Joint Offices, Finsbury Park, London.

<sup>108</sup> The name of the 'Habsburg' dynasty, also called the 'House of Austria', is sometimes spelled 'Hapsburg' in English publications, perhaps to reflect a frequent English pronunciation of the name. The Spanish branch of this family also employ the 'Hapsburg' spelling. The official spelling for the family that oversaw the Austro-Hungarian Empire is 'Habsburg' however, and this is the version employed in this research.

another hallmark of empire plays at the Court, and particularly present in Bond's *The Sea*. A notable divergence from Osborne's two earlier empire-related Court plays, was that, whereas *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer* directly regarded Britain, with *A Patriot for Me*, Osborne opted to set the play in *Mittel-Europa* and the Viennese court of the Habsburg dynasty. By setting this play in Austria, a sufficiently 'alien' locale, Osborne cleverly holds a distant mirror to the British Empire, without directly criticising that institution. Osborne could have easily used events surrounding the trial and ultimate hanging of Roger Casement in 1916. This was an almost identical, historically contemporaneous incident involving a high-ranking civil servant and knight of the realm accused of espionage and treachery, and a man who was also assumed to be homosexual. This is a historical incident well-known to Osborne's generation and considering the notoriety and temporal setting of this case, it is highly likely that Osborne had considered dramatising Casement's story.<sup>109</sup> The fact that Osborne chose instead to set his play within the Austrian Empire suggests he might have felt that a British setting would have been either unpalatable for himself or a British audience, or both.

Osborne's reasoning in choosing a foreign empire for his play may have been to provide distance from the homosexuality, which was still illegal in Britain at the time. The non-British setting also allows a British audience to consider the negative aspects of imperialism and elitism, without having to feel any direct culpability. Viewed via an

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<sup>109</sup> Roger Casement, formerly Sir Roger Casement (1864-1916), was an Anglo-Irishman who worked as a British diplomat at the height of the British Empire. He became a human rights champion in the Congo and was knighted. His specific experience of imperialism in Africa awakened in him an impetus to support the Irish cause for independence in the land of his birth. Back in Ireland, he became involved with nationalist movements. He was arrested by the British for landing weapons at Banna Strand, Co. Kerry at Easter 1916. The arsenal had been left by a German submarine, sent to support the Easter Rising in Dublin that year. Casement was subsequently convicted of and executed for treason at Pentonville Prison, London. Previous to his trial, the British government circulated excerpts from his personal journals, which became known as *The Black Diaries*, and which detailed Casement's many homosexual encounters. The authenticity of these diaries remain disputed, though they were generally accepted as genuine by the British public. Their contents went some way to cementing a link between homosexuality and treachery in the British consciousness which can be mapped to later works such as Julian Mitchell's *Another Country* (1981), based on the Cambridge spy ring. In 1965, the year *A Patriot for Me* premiered, Casement's remains were finally repatriated to Ireland, where they lay in state for five days before a funeral and burial with full military honours which was attended by some 30,000 people, including the President of Ireland, Éamon de Valera.

Austro-Hungarian prism, a British audience could process the machinations of an imperial society more objectively, regard the phenomenon of imperialism, its pomp and glory, tradition and regime, its hypocrisies and its repressive aspects, from a more critical distance and without deep national prejudice. Hence, the non-British setting facilitates an objectivity unclouded by nationalism and provides for an unbiased consideration of the mechanisms of empire in the play. Moreover, Osborne was potentially concerned that it would be difficult to evoke sympathy from a British audience for a homosexual Anglo-Irishman accused of treason to the British Crown. By employing the Redl story, and putting distance in place, it was easier to invite the audience to empathise.

In common with his earlier plays *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer*, Osborne is ambivalent in his stance on empire in *A Patriot for Me*. Paradoxically, for a rebel whom many had originally cast as the playwright who dragged British Theatre into the twentieth century, Osborne was consistently enthralled by empire, and class. In his memoirs, *A Better Class of Person* (1981), Osborne recalls receiving a prize for literature in his first year at boarding school from an English tutor he recalled somewhat fondly. This prize was a ‘huge, dull book about the Austro-Hungarian Empire,’ which he says he dipped into when writing *A Patriot for Me* (Osborne, 1981:133). His attraction to the imperial court is evident, yet it is yoked to a criticism of such a society’s intolerance and the erasure of individualism that operated within. Although the most controversial theme of the play is that of the portrayal of the homosexual, it is in some ways a distraction from the other issues Osborne explores here, as Gill, who directed a revival of *A Patriot for Me* in 1995, has noted, stating that this play was not so much about history or homosexuality but ‘very much about England, class and exclusion’ (Gillerman, 2002: 142). Like many of Osborne’s plays, *A Patriot for Me* is amenable to a class reading. Redl was excluded by imperial society for reasons beyond his sexuality, reasons that included his class, his lack of wealth and to some extent his ethnicity and his religion – as he was partly Jewish. England and the British Empire enter the play solely via the guise of an Etonian boater hat, a keepsake from a lover of Redl’s, the son of a British diplomat. This Etonian boater can also be viewed as a class signifier, with a social

inversion in the suggestion of Redl, a lower-middle class *parvenu* ‘corrupting’ the upper class son of the British Ambassador. The boater is later used to blackmail Redl, hence the upper class is ultimately triumphant, which can be understood as the lower-middle class Osborne’s take on class dynamics within empire – that the upper classes will always win.

Like many of Osborne’s protagonists – Jimmy Porter, Archie Rice and Luther – in the character of Redl, Osborne provides an individual pitted against a society, against rules and mores to which their nature cannot comply, and resentments which fester because of this. In this case, Redl’s rage is far more tightly constrained and repressed, unlike that of Jimmy Porter, or even Archie Rice. If Rebellato views Jimmy Porter as the embodiment of a masculine anger at the dying empire, Redl can be understood as the silent rage of empire’s repressed outsider. In light of the unease and anxiety in British society and at the Court at this time, is salutary to note that this is an Osborne play that most closely regards the functions and power dynamics of an institution.

### iii. Mapping commentary on empire in *West of Suez*

Fifteen years after the celebrated and infamous debut of *Look Back in Anger*, Osborne’s twelfth play *West of Suez* (1971) headlined the Court’s programme in August of that year. Unlike *The Entertainer* and *A Patriot for Me*, this play did not gaze back at a lost era, rather Osborne’s first Court play of the 1970s directly scrutinised the postcolonial state, and is widely understood to be a lament for the loss of empire. *West of Suez* was directed by Page who was by then a co-Artistic Director in the Court’s triumvirate management. This work is set in a fictional British former colony, an island, shortly after its independence, as it transits into a tax haven for British and American exiles. *West of Suez* is an ensemble piece but with a key character more pivotal than others, Wyatt Gillman. He is an upper-class seventy-year-old writer, in the Evelyn Waugh vein, enduring a family visit to the island with his four married daughters and their husbands.<sup>110</sup> Gillman (played by Ralph Richardson in

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<sup>110</sup> Although there are four sisters in this work, as opposed to three, it is possible to trace Chekhovian influences in this work, and there is a reference to Trofimov, the eternal student in *The Cherry Orchard* (Osborne, [1971]1998: 184).

the Court's production) is stranded, redundant and mired in postcolonial *ennui*. It is this character that prompts the critic Holland to ask where the anger has gone, in the quote that prefaces this chapter. Gillman's conservative views are often absurd and deliberately so, yet Osborne provides him with the rich and seductive vocabulary, humour and sophistication needed to impress an audience. Gillman opines intelligently on his situation and with affecting poetic articulation:

Always weary, ineffably bored, always in some sort of vague pain and always with a bit of unsatisfying hatred burying away on the inside like heartburn or indigestion. (Osborne, 1998: 201)

Gillman mourns what is lost, and in light of the rising popularity of non-text based performance in theatre, his particular lament for the decline of words is revealing: 'I still cling pathetically to the old bardic belief that words alone are a certain good' (Osborne, [1971]1998: 204). Gillman appears to play a part, not dissimilarly to Archie Rice, as if the true man is never glimpsed. This character is also wont to make outrageous statements for his own amusement, in the manner of an old rogue. Moreover, he effects a childishness when it benefits him, but he is a clever fox, aware of the impact of his words and when they hit their target. In an interview, he teases an island journalist: 'I'm just an old radical who detests progress' (Osborne, [1971]1998: 200). The interview slowly sours as he patronisingly refers to the 'delightful little island of yours', and later, deliberately to cause offence, he utters the words that will ultimately lead to his demise:

All the good things I've seen of the island seem to be legacies of the British, the Spanish and the Dutch, particularly in the buildings and what's left of any proper dispensation of the law. As for the people, they seem to me to be a very unappealing mixture of hysteria and lethargy, brutality and sentimentality. (Osborne, [1971]1998: 204)

If Gillman represents the empire and all that is lost, contemporary liberal views are voiced by a hysterical and foul mouthed American:

You all, you all bastards... I sit here listening to you. Having your fancy dinner and your wine from France and England. You know what I think of you? What we think of you? What we think of you? Fuck all your shit – that's what we think.... I'm not interested in your arguments, not that they are, of your so-called memories and all that pathetic shit. The only thing that matters, man is blood, man. Blood... You know what that means? No, no, you surely as hell don't. No, no when you pigs, you pigs go, it ain't going to be no fucking fourth of July. (Osborne, [1971]1998: 211)

Jed's limited vocabulary and vulgar expressions are presented as ridiculous, and are not designed to portray the character in a sympathetic light. For an American, his speech also has an unlikely Anglo-focus. In his reference to the fourth of July, American Independence Day, Jed emphasises the holiday's association with the British leaving the US, an association which is not normally primary in an American's conception of the holiday. In this respect, Jed appears an inauthentic character penned by a British writer with a strong Anglo-centric viewpoint, and is an example of the issues that can arise when the postcolonial story is recounted by those who were the colonisers; there is frequently a lack of credibility to the voice and the viewpoints frequently reveal those of the colonisers, albeit unwittingly.

Gillman's daughter, Evangie, instigates a fond listing of the objects in Gillman's father's study, a near inventory of imperialist symbols: joss sticks, Burmese guns, saddle oil, back issues of *The Times of Natal*, a time-table of the South India Railway, two volumes of *In China with the British*, Zulu grammar, rawhide shields, dried python skins, manuals in Urdu, brass iguanas and a signed photograph of Lord Minto (Osborne, [1971]1998: 192). The role call of these items works to evoke a nostalgia from the audience. Osborne's biographer, John Heilpern, comments on this play: 'among its serious flaws... He skirts Tory nostalgia for the empty trappings and style of the old world' (Heilpern, 2006: 267).

Ultimately, Gillman is murdered by armed islanders and it is suggested that this is because of his earlier comments to the journalist. It is an action which implies further danger and violence to come in this postcolonial world. When this incident occurs, another character, Edward, shouts out the play's famous line 'My God, they shot the fox!'. This reference may be directly to the character of Gillman who has many of the characteristics attributed to a fox. Alternatively, as Gillman represents the old style colonialist, this reference could also be understood as a metaphor for empire and perhaps indicative of a belief that the revolutionaries, whether freedom fighters or socialists, no longer had their quarry in sight; there was no more nemesis to bring down now that the empire, the fox, was

gone and therefore those who had wished for this outcome must contend with their hollow lives. This ending could be read as Osborne depicting and predicting a moral and cultural collapse in the wake of the decline of the British Empire. Conservative, pro-imperial and anachronistic, *West of Suez* was a curious choice of play for the Court's programme at this tumultuous time in British history and for a theatre once known for its progressive stance.

*West of Suez* opened at the Court on August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1971. Reviews were mixed, with many accusing Osborne of penning a threnody to empire. The play was seen by some to be evidence that Osborne had shifted politically to the right, although Osborne claimed: 'The play is about decaying of tongues, not just colonial empires but of emotional empires too' (Heilpern, 2006: 367). *The Saturday Review*, recognizing Osborne's sympathy with Gillman, called this character's comments 'more Osbornian in their deliberate unfashionability than they are in their wit'.<sup>111</sup> A decade later, *West of Suez* was referred to as a 'bleak and cheerless play' in an article on 'Middle Age of the Angry Young Men'.<sup>112</sup> Despite the critics' luke-warm reception for *West of Suez*, there was still public appetite for Osborne plays and, possibly, a desire for plays infused with nostalgia for the days of colonialism and the characters that loomed large therein. *West of Suez* did well enough with the public to transfer to the Cambridge Theatre that October, and Ralph Richardson won the 1971 London Theatre Critics Award for his performance (Billington, 2012: 229; Little & McLaughlin, 2007: 141; Roberts, 1999: 131).

*West of Suez* (1971) and its focus on empire can be viewed as a further example of an apparent fear of dethronement on the part of the newly elevated (lower) middle classes such as Osborne, and a general nervousness of the increased foreign influence and the growing voice of the former colonies, in society at large and at the Court in particular. Osborne's play also unwittingly throws into relief the lack of diversity in the Court's

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<sup>111</sup> *The Saturday Review*, volume 54, 1971.

<sup>112</sup> Weatherby, WJ, 'Middle Age of the Angry Young Men', *Sunday Times Magazine*, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1981.

programme in the 1960s through to 1972, and the resistance to new directions in theatre was indicative of an insecure and defensive culture preoccupied by a bygone imperial era.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

The empire era world view lingered and manifested at the Court as a mistrust of the foreign, and a resentment of outside influence, both of which were exacerbated by Britain's weakened influence on the world stage. This suspicion of 'the other' was yoked to a grief for, and occasionally a fascination with, a period when Britain was a major world force and trend-setter – the heyday of empire. For all the outward signs of a society undergoing a transformation, and the progressive victories of the late 1960s – the repeal of conservative laws, the creativity in the arts, the arrival of a Labour government, and perhaps even because of the swift pace of change – there remained to varying degrees, traces of an imperialist mentality and hegemonic attitudes at work at the Court. In this light, the Continental European genesis and American incubation of the alternative movement can be considered as a source of threat to British culture as Britain's global influence disappeared.



## Chapter Three

### Oscar Lewenstein, the Outsider

It is astonishing, for example, that the producer and impresario Oscar Lewenstein, a survivor of the inter-war workers' theatre movement who emerged as a key figure in the establishment of the English Stage Company and an influential mediator of Theatre Workshop to his contemporaries, is so little known. He deserves a new study all to himself.<sup>113</sup>

In this quote from Stephen Lacey's 2009 review of Yael Zarhy-Levo's 2008 publication, *The Making of Theatrical Reputations*, it is clear that some questions are finally surfacing in regard to why the figure of Lewenstein, who was such an integral part of the Court's narrative since the founding of the English Stage Company, is largely absent from the forefront of studies on the Sloane Square institution. So far in this thesis, the established understanding of the 1968-1975 period at the Court has been examined, its credibility questioned and its research gaps identified. This study progressed to reveal that, although there were tensions during this era, the strife between the management and the Court's emergent 1970s playwrights has been exaggerated. It has been established that this narrative has acted as a distraction from another, greater, cause of unease, that of the decline of the British Empire and its impact, the fears it stoked, and the defensiveness it elicited at the Sloane Square institution. This research has also brought to attention the fact that the emergent 1970s writers fitted the conventions, traditions and institutional habitus of the Court insofar as they shared the institution's focus on the literary tradition, were white Englishmen who had overwhelmingly been privately and Oxbridge educated, and they themselves exhibited a degree of unwillingness to fully embrace the culture of diversity that was emerging on the alternative scene. The young 1970s playwrights had, however, ostensibly aligned themselves with the alternative movement, which was in turn associated with American and non-British culture. There is a suggestion that it was this threat of

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<sup>113</sup> Lacey, S., (review of *The Making of Theatrical Reputations: Studies from the Modern London Theatre*, Zarhy-Levo.Y, Iowa Press, 2008), 2009: 63-64. See: <https://search.proquest.com/openview/956304104417ec937feda8c2f3b411d5/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=45035> [accessed May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015]

foreign influence that the Court's triumvirate management found unpalatable, and perhaps even threatening. Therefore, the Court did not fully deliver the support to which the emergent 1970s playwrights felt entitled. This thesis has further mapped the ways in which the Court's culture was yoked to the British Empire and its associated conventions, and that their focus on imperial culture, conscious and subconscious, was evident in the Court's programme throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, and is also apparent in the theatre's institutional habitus of that era.

This final chapter specifically focuses Lewenstein's artistic directorship of the Court (1972-1975). An interrogation of the received narrative has revealed Lewenstein's tenure as having been scantily attended to in scholarship, certainly less than appears merited. Exemplifying the accepted attitude to Lewenstein's time at the helm is Stafford-Clark who dismissively says Lewenstein came to the Court as a 'bridging regime'.<sup>114</sup> Roberts claims in his 1999 study that, as far as the Court's establishment was concerned, Lewenstein was not to be compared with his two predecessors as Artistic Director, Devine and Gaskill (Roberts, 1999:144). This chapter explores this interpretation of the Lewenstein years as insignificant and reveals that this is an inaccurate appraisal and one that has been retrospectively constructed, and subsequently reinforced by specious commentary of the then emergent playwrights of the 1970s. This chapter contends that Lewenstein's artistic directorship has further become unfairly enmeshed with that of the preceding triumvirate era (1969-1972) and is now tainted by that period's largely unwarranted notoriety as a time fraught with intergenerational wrangling. This chapter rehabilitates Lewenstein's legacy by distinctly ring-fencing, observing and mapping his specific contributions and the advancements he instigated at the Court. To challenge the obfuscation regarding his tenure, this chapter interrogates the accepted account of the Lewenstein era and looks beyond the received

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<sup>114</sup> Max Stafford-Clark, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Out of Joint Offices, Finsbury Park, London.

narrative by examining the programme of plays Lewenstein staged and the writers he championed whilst in office, such as Brian Friel, Mustapha Matura and Caryl Churchill.

Building on strands previously developed, a further aim of this chapter is to advance the argument that the Lewenstein directorship was a radical time of seed-sowing, of fostering talents from marginalised sections of society, particularly those from the black, Irish and female demographics. This was not only an important departure from the Court's approach to programming at that specific time: Lewenstein's actions further served to recalibrate the Court's position on the front line of progressive theatre in Britain in a manner that has hitherto not been fully understood and appreciated in scholarship.

To deliver a fuller and more nuanced history of the Lewenstein years, this chapter also considers why a more accurate and positive account of his era may have been occluded. It explores the extent to which Lewenstein's attitude towards the institutional habitus of the Court was informed and spurred by his own position as an establishment outsider. It will further argue that the emergent white male English 1970s playwrights might have felt excluded and displaced at the Court under Lewenstein because, in contrast to the playwrights he fostered, they could not claim to represent a subaltern demographic, whether of the working classes, the black community, the Irish or female, and that this was a factor behind their decision to seek a platform elsewhere. Refracted through the optics of this advancement of the female and subaltern, this chapter will progress the proposition that the Lewenstein era at the Court was radical in a way previously attributed to the emergence of the 'angry-young-men' in the late 1950s.

### **3.1 Lewenstein in the received narrative of the Court**

Oscar Lewenstein (1917-1994) is one of the least celebrated Artistic Directors in the history of the Court. Stafford-Clark's reference to his tenure as a 'bridging regime' implies that Lewenstein left little lasting impression on the Court and his artistic directorship was not of any great significance. As was revealed in the introduction, Lewenstein's directorship is thus afforded thin focus in scholarship, particularly in comparison with that allocated to

his fellow Artistic Directors: Devine, Gaskill, Stafford-Clark and Daldry. As has been previously referenced, describing Lewenstein's tenure as a 'stormy one', Little and McLaughlin claim in their 2007 publication on the Court, the most recent on the Sloane Square theatre, that Lewenstein was installed due to his 'conservative management practices', although they concede, somewhat underwhelmingly, that he 'programmed effectively' (Little and McLaughlin, 2007:155). They suggest that, like his predecessors in the triumvirate, Lewenstein primarily 'promoted the work of Osborne, Bond, Storey and Hampton', and they credit Wright with guiding Lewenstein to introduce Irish playwrights Brian Friel, Edna O'Brien,<sup>115</sup> and the anti-apartheid white South African writer Athol Fugard<sup>116</sup>, to the Court (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 155). Lewenstein needed no guidance in this area. As Howarth recalls: 'He loved Irish playwrights, such as Friel and O'Casey and Edna O'Brien. And he put on Shelagh Delaney's'<sup>117</sup> *A Taste of Honey*'.<sup>118</sup> Margareta D'Arcy, an early Court figure, playwright and actor who wrote collaboratively with her late husband John Arden, recalls sharing a theatre panel with Lewenstein in Derry in 1975, a city for which he was advocating a civic theatre.<sup>119</sup>

Harriet Devine's appraisal of Lewenstein's tenure has been the most positive of all published assessments, yet even she is ambiguous. In her 2006 interview with the Caribbean playwright Mustapha Matura, whose work Lewenstein fostered, she comments '[Lewenstein] did all kinds of things at the Royal Court that hadn't been done before and may not have been done if he had not appeared' (Devine, H. 2005: 226). It should be noted that Devine tempers this statement by prefacing it with the comment 'It's only in the last couple of years that I have come to understand how important and serious a man Oscar was.

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<sup>115</sup> Lewenstein had an established relationship with Ireland, and the Abbey Theatre in particular, and was already supportive of Irish drama and Irish causes and was more aware of Irish drama than anyone else at the Court.

<sup>116</sup> Wright did later inform Lewenstein of David Lan's enthusiasm for the premiere of *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* in Cape Town. Howarth who had attended the same performance had already both written and telephoned Lewenstein directly, urging him to programme the play at the Court on the main stage.

<sup>117</sup> Shelagh Delaney was not Irish, but from Salford, Lancashire. As her name suggests, Delaney was of the large Irish immigrant community in that city.

<sup>118</sup> Donald Howarth, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, Sept. 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Lower Mall, Hammersmith, London.

<sup>119</sup> Margareta D'Arcy, unpublished interview with Sue Healy via email, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

He was not a popular man – he was not personally liked. He was not a physically attractive man’ (Devine, H. 2006: 226). This portrayal is striking in its focus on Lewenstein’s physicality, and it is one that is echoed in a comment by Howarth: when asked his opinion on Lewenstein he offers firstly ‘Oscar wasn’t attractive, physically, as a person. He was short, diminutive’.<sup>120</sup> These statements unwittingly lay bare an engrained negative bias against Lewenstein within Court culture, even when wishing to be generous. They demonstrate that any appreciation of Lewenstein’s legacy therein is, to a degree, surprising. Howarth, an old Court associate whom Lewenstein recruited as Literary Manager in 1974, had a positive relationship with Lewenstein and recalls him fondly but admits, ‘People didn’t like Oscar. He was certainly unpopular and viewed unfairly’.<sup>121</sup>

Where praise for Lewenstein is proffered, it normally arrives from female and subaltern theatre-makers. As has been previously shown, Little and McLaughlin repeat Kureishi’s statement that Lewenstein capitalised on ‘the psychological loosening of empire,’ but do not expand in any great detail on this comment (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 156). In Devine’s book, Matura goes on to credit Lewenstein with bringing an international perspective to the Sloane Square theatre (Devine, H., 2006: 226). Such acclaim appears to have made little impact on the broader narrative. Once more it is the perception of Lewenstein’s tenure provided by the emergent white male playwrights of the 1970s that has become the dominant understanding of his time at the helm. In Devine’s book, complaining that his work was not supported at the Court due to its ‘political’ nature, Hare alleges Lewenstein once told him:

‘As a Jew who came to Britain in the 1930s, I’m not going to put on work which is so savagely critical. You must understand that for me this country is a haven, and to have it talked about in this way – I just don’t accept the version of England that you have.’ (Devine, H. 2007: 153)

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<sup>120</sup> Donald Howarth, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Lower Mall, Hammersmith, London.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

This is a curious quote from Hare, not least because Lewenstein was in fact born in Hackney in 1917 and grew up in Sussex, but also because Lewenstein produced a notable amount of political theatre in his lifetime, particularly during his time at Unity Theatre in Glasgow (Lewenstein, 1994: 68-69). Yet, Hare's reportage of this Lewenstein quote is accepted to the degree that it is reprinted in its entirety on the first page of the introduction to the Lewenstein years in Little and McLaughlin's book (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 155). It is also interesting that Hare highlights Lewenstein's Jewish heritage as a reason for not, in his view, supporting the work of the white middle-class English playwrights. Hare's focus on Lewenstein's perceived attitude towards these young playwrights signals his own understanding that Lewenstein's artistic directorship is defined by the fact Lewenstein did not offer due support to Hare and his colleagues, and that the Court suffered in consequence. There was a great deal more to Lewenstein's tenure, as this chapter reveals.

It is enlightening at this point to fully examine Lewenstein's long association with the Court. Devine is most often, and inaccurately, referred to as 'the founder' of the English Stage Company. In fact, the company was formed by Lewenstein, Ronald Duncan and others in 1955 before it was established at the Royal Court Theatre building in Sloane Square in 1956 and Devine and Richardson's involvement was solicited. Lewenstein's role in the founding of the institution that became known informally as 'the Court' was, arguably, as significant as Devine's and he was certainly key to its launch.<sup>122</sup> As Howarth recalls:

Oscar was present at the meeting when George Devine and Tony Richardson had approached Alfred Esdaile the year before to discuss renting one of his venues. It was Oscar who the following year had the idea to bring George Devine and Tony Richardson in to the English Stage Company. George Devine agreed to run the Royal Court on condition that Tony Richardson join him as his associate.<sup>123</sup>

Lewenstein's precise involvement in the beginnings of the present day incarnation of the Court is not unrecorded. His involvement has been documented in some detail in extant

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<sup>122</sup> The director Tony Richardson, in association with Devine, also played a key role in realising the theatre in its present incarnation.

<sup>123</sup> Donald Howarth, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Lower Mall, Hammersmith, London.

scholarship (Storey, 2012: 374; Wardle, 1978: 164; Lewenstein, 1994: 10; Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 13,14). Nevertheless, his role is not usually given prominence in Court history, and when mentioned, it is often downplayed, as in Stafford-Clark referring to his directorship as a ‘bridging regime.’

It is helpful, therefore, to identify and map Lewenstein’s specific association with the Sloane Square institution, in order to fully appreciate the peculiarity of his omission from the foreground of the Court narrative. In 1953, in a move that can in hindsight be viewed as typical of his vision, Lewenstein facilitated the staging of Bertolt Brecht’s *Mother Courage* (1939) at the Taw and Torridge Festival of the Arts in Devon that year. Working with Littlewood at the Theatre Royal Stratford East as a theatre manager, he travelled to Berlin to convince Brecht to grant permission for the staging of the Theatre Workshop Company’s production of his play at the festival. The resulting under-rehearsed show, featuring and directed by Littlewood, received dire notices at the time. The critic Tynan famously panned the production insisting that Littlewood did not understand Brecht, which now seems an incongruous statement. In contrast, in 1984, the *Sunday Times* critic Harold Hobson refers to the occasion in his memoirs as the true introduction of progressive theatre to Britain: ‘The theatrical revolution usually associated with the Royal Court Theatre really began in the Queen’s Hall, Barnstaple, Devon, with the first British professional production of a play by Brecht’ (Hobson, 1984: 7; Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 13; Lewenstein, 1994: 24). Howarth agrees that Lewenstein was underappreciated in this regard:

Largely, the issue was that he wasn’t viewed as an ‘artist’, but as an entrepreneur. He produced, he made things work, he didn’t direct, in contrast to Tony Richardson who did. But of course, this is unfair. Oscar produced Brecht before anyone else. For Oscar, plays had to be political, and socially left.<sup>124</sup>

Lewenstein’s conversations with the Devon festival’s founder, the actor, poet and playwright Ronald Duncan, inspired the pair to endeavour to establish a progressive ‘playwright’s theatre’ where the written word would be primary (Lewenstein, 1994: 10). It

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<sup>124</sup> Donald Howarth, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, Sept. 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Lower Mall, Hammersmith, London.

was this seed that led to Lewenstein founding the English Stage Company with Duncan and a number of his associates who later invited Devine and Richardson to take over the artistic directorship, which subsequently led to the establishment of the Court in the present Sloane Square theatre in 1956 (Wardle, 1978: 164; Lewenstein, 1994: 10; Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 13,14).

During the 1960s, Lewenstein focused, with significant financial reward, on the film industry. He produced a number of acclaimed movies of the era and his successes included: *A Taste of Honey* (1961), *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962), *Tom Jones* (1963), *The Girl with Green Eyes* (1963), *One Way Pendulum* (1964), *The Knack* (1965) and also Francois Truffaut's *The Bride Wore Black* (1968). In terms of theatre, he was also notably successful in regards to arranging West End transfers including plays such as Behan's *The Hostage* and Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* and producing classics including Willis Hall and Keith Waterhouse's *Billy Liar* (1960) and Joe Orton's *What the Butler Saw* (1969). Lewenstein maintained a close association with the Court over the following sixteen years since its genesis, producing many of the film projects which had first lived as plays at the Sloane Square theatre. When the Chairman of the English Stage Company, Neville Blond, died in 1970, Lewenstein was appointed joint Chairman with Robin Fox. When Fox then died in 1971, Lewenstein became the sole Chairman and remained so until taking over the artistic directorship in 1972, where he remained until 1975. Considering his key and long-standing association with the Court, and specifically his tenure as Artistic Director at the Court, it is curious that his tenure has not been given more rigorous attention in scholarship.

As a millionaire and a communist, Lewenstein was a figure of contradictions. As he recounts in his autobiography *Kicking Against the Pricks* (1994), he was born in Hackney to Russian Jewish parents who had fled to England to escape a pogrom. He, in fact, had a very English childhood, growing up beside the beach at Hove and later on the Isle of Wight in some comfort. His father's plywood and laminated plastic business ultimately collapsed, reducing the family to near poverty, and they were forced to move to a cheap flat in Stoke



Newington, and the young Oscar was removed from his private school. It was an early introduction to struggle and it occurred during the 1930s, in tandem with the rise of fascism; it was the era of the Battle of Cable Street when working-class Jews and Irish dockers in London's East End faced off Mosley's blackshirts, and won (Lewenstein, 1994: 52).

Lewenstein emerged from these years politicised. As his memoirs relay, his left-wing leanings led him to read Marx and join protest marches and, when war broke out, he signed up, was classified as grade 'C' and assigned to work on the home front teaching illiterate people to read and write – which brought him into further contact with impoverished sections of society.<sup>125</sup> As he notes in his autobiography, the experience also taught him how to organise people, to function well at meetings and manage disparate groups of people – skills which he credited with providing him with the confidence to appraise plays and films and to seek fulfilment enabling others to practise their art. When the war ended, he became manager of the left-wing Unity Theatre. He later moved to London and came into contact with the Theatre Workshop and Joan Littlewood, and latterly this involvement led to his co-founding the Court (Lewenstein, 1994: 83). His background therefore contrasts markedly with the conventional middle-class upbringing of Court management at that time. Although acquainted with privilege in his youth, he was not of the indigenous establishment, and he had endured instability and struggle and saw his education cut short. Lewenstein was a businessman, he was Jewish, he was a communist and he had not been to Oxford.

### **3.2 Lewenstein and the Court's Oxford fraternity**

The Court, since Devine's time, had been largely a receiving institution for Oxford graduates (Devine, H., 2006: 153). Wright observes the divide between the Court's old guard and the emergent 1970s playwrights: 'as an outsider, I did notice that all the people on one side had been to Cambridge and all the others had been to Oxford' (Roberts, 1999: 102). Howarth

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<sup>125</sup> Fit for home service only.

provides further illumination to this Oxford bias; he had grown up in West Bowling, Bradford near Richardson and Gaskill,<sup>126</sup> albeit in less privileged circumstances, and recalls how he had attempted to ‘bluff’ his way into a job at the Court by dissembling an Oxford association:

When I was interviewed for a position of assistant director at the Royal Court in 1958, George Devine asked me what college at Oxford I had gone to, assuming that I had been to Oxford. I hadn’t. I’d studied drama under Esmé Church at Bradford but I had spent five days staying with Bill Gaskill when he was at Hertford College helping him design a set for *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, so I answered ‘Hertford’. I had had a previous experience of such questioning at an interview for the BBC, having been asked if I’d gone to Oxford or Cambridge, so I knew I should say I had been to Oxford. It was how it was then. However, I didn’t get the job as Bill Gaskill knew I hadn’t been to Oxford and he would have told George Devine that I hadn’t. The main thing was I wasn’t one of them.<sup>127</sup>

Indeed, Devine had once told one of his new recruits, ‘One thing you must understand if you are going to work in this theatre, is the difference between an Oxford man and a Cambridge man’ (Wardle, 1978: 193); Lewenstein had attended neither university and yet he was Artistic Director of the Court, a fact which some Court figures possibly found unpalatable.

Wright has also suggested that the particular hostility towards Lewenstein may have been rooted in anti-Semitism; Lewenstein’s Jewishness undoubtedly underscored his outsider status. Howarth recalls his shock during this era upon hearing a key Court figure refer to the Artistic Director of the theatre as that ‘horrid little Jew.’<sup>128</sup> The Court’s chief set-designer, Jocelyn Herbert later commented of Lewenstein, ‘he wheedled his way in... You always felt he’d got there by default. I know we all resented him’ (Roberts, 1999: 143). Gaskill recorded in his memoirs that, in regards to Lewenstein assuming control of the Court, he felt, ‘Lewenstein had been biding his time’ (Gaskill, 1988: 130). Gaskill’s employment of the phrase ‘biding his time’, and Herbert’s use of ‘wheedle’, and a later suggestion in the same publication that Lewenstein was ‘conniving’ with Albert Finney to

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<sup>126</sup> Richardson and Gaskill grew up 200 metres apart in Shipley. Howarth, who says he himself was from ‘the wrong side of town’, knew them both as they were all members of Richardson’s Shipley Young Theatre. Howarth remembers considering them both solidly bourgeois as Richardson’s father was a pharmacist and an alderman and Gaskill’s a headmaster.

<sup>127</sup> Donald Howarth, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, Sept. 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015, 9 Lower Mall, Hammersmith, London.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

get control of the Old Vic, are phrases with implicit anti-Semitic connotations. This is not to suggest that these Court figures who used them were anti-Semitic: Herbert had familial Jewish connections and the Court itself was long a beneficiary of Jewish philanthropy. Nonetheless, the free and unthinking use of these phrases suggests a *habitus* wherein such language was common and not objectionable. These are also words associated with strategy and military planning and are of note in the context of the decline of the British Empire, where dominions were calling for an upheaval in power structures. Viewed through the optics of society witnessing its empire in terminal demise, experiencing a fear of the foreign, of cultural invasion, and combined with Lewenstein's insistence on elevating voices from former British colonies, there may have been an unconscious linking of Lewenstein with that threat, at least in the minds of the Court establishment. In this way, resistance to both Lewenstein's actions and his position can be seen as connected to empire and its class-based and Anglo-centric culture. Lewenstein, the son of Russian Jewish refugees, had taken control of the middle-class English Court and he was using its stage to promote and advance the work of those who had been oppressed by the British Empire, at the expense of emergent white male middle-class English playwrights who considered the Court their inheritance.

It is helpful to consider how and to what extent these underlying tensions may possibly have affected Lewenstein's own world view and prompted him, when programming new playwrights at the Court as Artistic Director, to look beyond the sort of playwrights who were constituent of an elite *habitus* that had excluded and had been hostile towards him to some extent. Lewenstein did not especially favour the emergent middle-class, white, male, university-educated, English playwrights of the early 1970s, such as Hare, Edgar and Wilson. The Court's programme of this period establishes that, Lewenstein keenly promoted, fostered and programmed on the main stage, playwrights from less heeded sections of society. These were playwrights from black, Irish and other immigrant groups, and female playwrights (Browne, 1975: 111).

Lewenstein's success in the business end of the arts, as a producer, was also viewed with implicit, and occasionally explicit, derision by some of his Court contemporaries. Observations, such as that by Herbert, telegraph the prevailing attitude of the Court establishment towards him: 'Oscar wasn't one of us, he wasn't an artist' (Roberts, 1999:143). David Gothard, who was a young stage manager at the Court during this era and later went on to manage the Riverside Studios recalls:

Oscar tended to annoy everyone, to behave a bit like a caricature. He was a money man, an impresario... Though his politics were radical. He had a way of talking that people didn't like. He definitely didn't fit in.<sup>129</sup>

It is of note that Gothard focuses on his 'way of talking' and that he was a 'caricature', such observations tally with an understanding that Lewenstein was an outsider, of a different culture and habitus compared to that of his white male Oxbridge educated colleagues. Likewise, Little and McLaughlin mention that Lewenstein's governance of the artistic policy was resented by the Court fraternity, that he was primarily considered an administrator (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 155). Whilst Wright observes:

Oscar was on the wrong side of that Royal Court snobbery which is very hard to cross and which he had never crossed. I don't think anybody liked him really, or behaved as if they liked him... The truth about Oscar was that he was a very good, generous employer and he programmed the theatre very well. Some of the best shows I've seen at the Court were put on by Oscar, but he was always patronised at best and abused at worst by the Royal Court establishment. [It was] partly anti-Semitism, partly that he was linked with the commercial theatre. Oscar wasn't a Zionist, he was anti-Zionist... Oscar was not a proper Jew, and he was a communist. (Roberts, 1999: 143)

Comments such as the above advance the argument that Lewenstein was seen by his colleagues as both an outsider and a usurper. Although Gaskill, Page and Anderson had initially supported Lewenstein's appointment, a sense of disunity was soon apparent during his directorship.

It should also be noted that the unease and strain at this time amongst the management stemmed in part at least from some straightforward managerial decisions by Lewenstein that were controversial. This is particularly true of Lewenstein's intention that

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<sup>129</sup> David Gothard, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Pimlico, London.

the English Stage Company would take over the Old Vic, and thereafter Albert Finney and Paul Scofield would become the directors of the Old Vic arm, while Anderson would take over directorship of the Court, and Lewenstein would remain Artistic Director of the English Stage Company as a whole (Lewenstein, 1994: 172). Many members of the Court fraternity fervently opposed this proposal, as Billington described at the time in the January 1973 *Plays and Players*: 'what business has a company devoted to new and often difficult work with a theatre seating 1,000 people? I suspect this could mean the end of everything Devine, Gaskill and others worked so tirelessly for'. Tensions peaked as minutes of a meeting of the Artistic Committee in that year attest:

Mr. Lewenstein explained that he had proposed that Mr. Anderson be Artistic Director and Anderson indicated 'fairly clearly' that he would not accept this suggestion. This was followed by an unpleasant scene between himself and Mr. Anderson at the party given for Ann Jellicoe and the Court's writers. After this Mr. Lewenstein had asked himself whether he could continue to work with Mr. Anderson.<sup>130</sup>

In fact, in his autobiography, as has been previously noted, Lewenstein states that the 'unpleasant scene' comprised of Anderson hitting him, and he had to be rescued by Matura (Lewenstein, 1994: 170). Retelling the incident in his autobiography, Lewenstein's markedly personal criticism of Anderson somewhat demonstrates how petty these inter-management tensions had become:

[Anderson] had no sense of proportion and wanted, like a small child, to have every matter with which he was concerned dealt with immediately without reference to anyone else's problems. (Lewenstein, 1994:170)

The same meeting minutes record Jellicoe voicing her concerns about the strained relationships amongst the management:

Miss Jellicoe said that to her a very valid point was that behind what was being said was a sense of bitterness and frustration. She said she was worried about the whole philosophy but also about the structure of the theatre which she felt was in danger.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the Artistic Committee meeting, December 3rd, 1973, English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/1/6/1).

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

These scenes reinforce the wisdom that there was internal friction at the Court during the early 1970s. Nonetheless, it is also at this point that this version of history departs from the received narrative. The antagonism is revealed as a power struggle amongst management, and most specifically, Lewenstein the outsider and the remainder of the Court management who were of a common background, culture and shared a *habitus*.

### **3.3 Lewenstein and playwrights from less heeded demographics**

As has been shown, the emergent 1970s playwrights have subsequently and repeatedly claimed that, by not wooing the next generation of playwrights, the Court entered a lost period in the early 1970s during which major writers of the era either abandoned or took leave from the Court (Hare in Findlater, 1981: 142). Roberts exemplifies the understanding of the period: ‘The loss to the Court was a whole generation of young artists’ (Roberts, 1999: 136). He further states the emergent writers were excluded from the main stage and therefore effectively disinherited (Roberts, 1999: 137). This thesis has explained that this understanding is not accurate and that both the triumvirate management and later Lewenstein programmed work by the emergent 1970s writers, albeit largely but not exclusively, in the Theatre Upstairs.

Additionally, during Lewenstein’s tenure, the Court advanced to promote and provide a platform to a generation of new playwrights. These playwrights were not predominantly writers from the white male English demographic. They were female playwrights, and Irish and black playwrights from the former British colonies of Ireland, South Africa and the Caribbean. Work programmed at the Court during this time included plays by Behan, Tom Mac Intyre, Friel, O’Brien, Churchill, Mary O’Malley, Matura, Michael Abbensetts, Kureishi and Fugard’s anti-apartheid work devised with the black actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona. Lewenstein installed Churchill as Resident Dramatist, Jenkins as General Manager and appointed Jellicoe as Literary Manager, thus increasing and empowering the female representation at the Court. Thereafter, Lewenstein appointed the black writer Abbensetts as Resident Dramatist, followed by the Irish Catholic

writer Wilson John Haire. Criticism that the Court failed to champion a new generation of playwrights in the early 1970s is clearly a very contestable interpretation of the evidence given what was staged at the Court during this time, and the artists Lewenstein introduced to the Court, many of whom went on to be acclaimed figures in modern theatre.

Lewenstein provided a main stage platform for writers from subaltern sections of society. A consideration of why Lewenstein would lean towards work by females and non-English, particularly in regards to plays pertaining to the former colonies, suggests that Lewenstein's politics played a part in his programming choices. As has been established earlier in this thesis, the emergent 1970s playwrights had received significantly greater advantages in life than their 1960s counterparts (Motton, 2009: 102-103). Notwithstanding their more privileged beginnings in life, these emergent 1970s English playwrights were left-wing and anti-establishment in stance and vocal in their demands for social change. Lewenstein was suspicious of the disconnect between the circumstance of their birth and their political views and it caused him to question their sincerity, stating in his autobiography: 'I did not feel then that the writers were serious political thinkers... I had spent my youth immersed in political activity and these writers seemed to me superficial' (Lewenstein, 1994: 149). He was alert to the fact that the emergent 1970s writers had little experience of personal struggle. The playwright Gregory Motton refers to them as 'public schoolboys playing politics,' and asserts that this fact was implicitly admitted by Wilson when commenting on the impact of their political work: 'I don't recall any of us being much interested in whether justice was served afterwards' (Motton, 2009: 118). Lewenstein, with his Russian immigrant background, stated that the politics of the emerging English playwrights of the 1970s did not seem to him to be deeply rooted or truly heartfelt: 'Whilst recognising the talent of these writers, I did not feel the same instinctive sympathy for their work as I did for that of the earlier Royal Court writers, finding their politics stuck uncomfortably onto their plays' (Lewenstein, 1994: 151). On this point, Lewenstein had an ally in Anderson who, according to Wright, also viewed the emergent 1970s writers as

‘phony left wingers’.<sup>132</sup> It appears that Lewenstein had more sympathy with those he felt had lived the struggle they wrote about. In later years, Hare himself conceded that plays such as *England’s Ireland* may have been ‘a very naïve impulse’ but further commented, with some justification, that such plays meant ‘British theatre covered a more interesting variety of subjects than it might have done without that impulse’ (Gaston: 218).<sup>133</sup> In his 2015 autobiography, Hare discusses the collaborative project *England’s Ireland* at length, yet the naivety and lack of understanding he still displays concerning Ireland is striking. Whilst delivering an exposition on his sympathy with and belief in the Irish nationalist cause, he is consistently, and quite probably unwittingly, offensive. He says that what was going on in Ireland was a ‘deeply *English* problem’ but does not elaborate or explain any further why or how that would be.<sup>134</sup> Viewed through the lens of Spivak’s theories, Hare’s attempt to situate England at the crux of an Irish story has strong traits of a dominant imperial culture presenting itself as subject and perpetuating itself as central to the subaltern narrative (Spivak, 1988: 271-313). Hare also refers to ‘Mainland Britain’ as if Ireland were somehow ‘off’ or ‘of’ Britain, which it is not, and this erroneous implication is particularly offensive to the Irish nationalist community with which he purports to be in sympathy.<sup>135</sup> Most revealing of Hare’s optics are the stereotypes running through his recollections of the production:

The cast was equally divided between Irish and English actors. The cultural differences were apparent in rehearsal and beyond. Often, giving notes at the end of a run through, you would find the two nationalities had arranged themselves silently on opposite sides of the rehearsal room. When socialising, the Irish would drink

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<sup>132</sup> Nicholas Wright: ‘*England’s Ireland* was written after Bloody Sunday. It was very topical. There was a meeting at the Royal Court that ended with an informal resolution to come up with a jointly-written play, this was *Lay By* and later *England’s Ireland*. A number of writers were involved, though in practice I think that each time Howard Brenton, David Hare and Snoo Wilson took the lead. Lindsay harboured a great dislike of their generation. He saw them as phony left wingers. It wasn’t the usual gentle begrudging of a rising generation, it was far more full on and sharp (Nicholas Wright, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, May 16th, 2016, Notting Hill, London).

<sup>133</sup> Gaston, Georg (May, 1993). ‘Interview: David Hare’. *Theatre Journal*. Vol. 45: 213–225.

<sup>134</sup> Hare’s emphasis.

<sup>135</sup> Great Britain is an island, thus named because it is greater, or larger, than the other smaller geographical area also called Britain, or as it is known today Brittany – which is in France. Ireland is a separate geographic Island and does not form a geographic part of Britain, or Brittany. The six Irish counties of Fermanagh, Armagh, Tyrone, Down, Antrim and Derry comprise of the political entity of Northern Ireland and as such form a constituent part of ‘the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland’. Northern Ireland is not part of the geographic entity of Great Britain.



themselves into passionate arguments at daybreak, usually revolving round what someone had or hadn't said in Dublin fifteen years earlier. The Brits, on the other hand, preferred to stay serene and drift away on dope. (Hare, 2015: 165)

Hare admits, though framing it as if it were a positive aspect of the production: 'none of us pretended to be experts. Nor did the play make us out to be' (Hare, 2015: 164).

Edgar, one of the emerging English playwrights of the era, and a collaborator on *England's Ireland*, stated in a 2005 interview with Harriet Devine that he believed Lewenstein had no sympathy with the 'post-1968 Left' (Devine, H., 2006: 100). As has been shown, other emerging English playwrights of the 1970s have claimed that one reason they were unsupported at the Court in the 1970s was because the management were 'squeamish' about politics (Hare in Findlater, 1981: 142). As has been highlighted in Chapter One, this is a highly contestable statement as the Court had staged political work throughout its existence. Such comments may be related to differing and context-specific conceptions of what might constitute 'political' work. Nevertheless, dismissing Lewenstein as 'squeamish' about politics is misleading.

Lewenstein had been introduced to theatre management via the working-class and stridently left-wing Unicorn Theatre in Glasgow. He was also a lifetime member of the Communist Party. His record shows that Lewenstein was evidently in favour of political theatre, a vocal champion of minority rights, worked on behalf of anti-apartheid movements and had an interest in the politics of Irish nationalism, and was demonstrably willing to be critical of England. Indeed, his own politics sometimes effected tension and mistrust from his colleagues. Wright recalls attending a meeting at Lois Sieff's house following that 'unpleasant scene' in which Anderson had accosted Lewenstein over the Old Vic debacle (Lewenstein, 1994:170).<sup>136</sup> According to Wright, at Seiff's, Anderson proceeded to make a speech denouncing Lewenstein and saying 'he had to go'. Wright recalls, 'I will never forget the brilliantly theatrical throw away inflection with which Lindsay said, "he's a communist of course"' (Wright in Roberts, 1999: 147). The Court was not an overtly

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<sup>136</sup> Recorded in minutes of Artistic Committee Meeting of December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1973, English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/1/6/1).

political theatre in the sense that the Unicorn Theatre was, or later McGrath's 7:84, or Belt and Braces. As Howarth posits, 'they were anti-authoritarian rather than political.'<sup>137</sup> Wright concurs to a degree: 'The Court did have a social and political agenda but it was in no way an orthodox or even activist Marxist setup in the way that Stratford East, for example, was'.<sup>138</sup> Lewenstein clearly had strong political convictions which may have underscored his difference from his colleagues at the Court. These beliefs quite likely prompted Lewenstein to support the unsupported. As Wright recalls:

Oscar's background was the left-wing Unity Theatre. He was a steadfast leftie, a 'tankie'... the leftwingers who thought it was alright for the Russians to roll the tanks into Hungary, were called 'tankies'.... This is why Oscar had so little time for David Hare and the other young playwrights. He saw them as dilettantes, he felt they were not really left wing in theory or in practice, for that matter.<sup>139</sup>

Wright's understanding of Lewenstein's issue with the emergent 1970s playwrights was not an uncommon one on the fractious left at that time. A new generation of left-wing thinkers had come to prominence, and this was a group rooted in and energised by the anti-War protests and anti-nuclear marches. Following the political upheavals of 1968, there was a consideration amongst older activists that this new generation of protesters were not realistic or genuine in their politics and that their hedonism was perhaps their greater priority. Labelled 'baby boomers' by sociologists, after the 'baby boom' that occurred in the wake of WWII, they were viewed by some of the older left-wingers as superficial. The 'baby boomer's included radicalised students who were emboldened by the *éventments* of Paris 1968. On mainland Europe, this new radicalism emerged which would ultimately result in Italy's violent splinter factions such as the Red Brigade or the Baader-Meinhof Group in Germany, though they were generally seen at the time by the old guard left, as ineffectual and insincere.

Lewenstein's choice of work to promote in both film and theatre throughout the 1960s also evidences this readiness to embrace political art and to take risks; he was

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<sup>137</sup> Donald Howarth, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, Sept. 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Lower Mall, Hammersmith, London.

<sup>138</sup> Nicholas Wright, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Notting Hill, London.

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*

evidently interested in plays which dovetailed with his left-wing political leanings. He had memorably brought Brecht's *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (1931) to the West End in 1964, delighting in the Marxist playwright showing in the heart of London's commercial theatre:

The critics hated me for it. But for me the production by Tony Richardson with Jocelyn Herbert's fine *décor* was one of the most enjoyable I have ever had a hand in. The most openly Marxist of all Brecht's plays, to have it playing in the Queen's Theatre in the very heart of the West End was a joy I shall not forget. What an heroic piece it is. Poetic and heroic. It only lacked a working class audience to enjoy it. (Lewenstein in Findlater, 1981: 167)

Lewenstein's subsequent tenure as Artistic Director at the Court continues this traceable urge to promote theatre highlighting social injustice.

When commenting retrospectively on the early to mid-1970s, the emergent English playwrights of the 1970s afford little difference between the triumvirate era and Lewenstein's tenure, and occasionally credit for Lewenstein's achievements is accorded to his successors, co-Artistic Directors Wright and Kidd. The early 1970s is denigrated in this narrative as an era when the Sloane Square theatre peeled from contemporary trends. On closer examination, any assertion that work by the emergent playwrights or political plays were unwelcome during the Lewenstein years appears feeble. Yet, despite his record, a view persists of Lewenstein's era as a continuation of a time in which the Court was reluctant to foster political theatre or embrace emerging trends in theatre-making.

This thesis has shown how disproportionately the emergent white male 1970s playwrights' interpretation of this era has been privileged by scholarship, as evidenced by Hare's much-reprinted quote in Findlater's book and further repeated commentary by other emergent white male playwrights from the era. Therefore, it is of particular interest here to revisit the fact that Hare's Findlater quote states that, during the 1970s, the Court 'finally refused to move into the field of English politics, although it was presenting excellent political work about the Third World' (Findlater, 1981: 142). Hare does not provide explanation as to why he believes that English politics were of greater import than the postcolonial politics of the former British dominions, or why plays on English topics should be privileged over the non-English, and nor has his stance been scrutinised in scholarship.

That Hare would suggest that English politics were paramount, as if this were a given, reveals the nature of the habitus to which he belonged. The implication that plays on the politics regarding the ‘Third World’ are less worthy than English plays displays a curious and anachronistic Anglo-centric mindset reminiscent of the imperial era.<sup>140</sup> Hare’s statement is particularly ironic as he was one of the seven English co-authors of a play on Ireland, *England’s Ireland* (1970), which despite the inclusion of ‘England’ in its title, is set in Ireland and focuses on Irish politics not English politics. Hare’s understanding appears to be that plays that moved outside of the realm of English politics were only acceptable at the Court if they were penned by English playwrights, and he does not recognise that this is an extraordinary belief and one which underscores the extent of the imperialist aspect of the institutional habitus of the Court. Additionally, Hare omits to mention that Lewenstein’s Court had produced Brenton’s *Magnificence* (1973), which did look at the political landscape in Britain at the time, fraught as it was with student protests and sit-ins. Lewenstein’s programming of *Magnificence* also demonstrates that, during his tenure, the Court did support emerging playwrights and that Lewenstein was willing to nurture political plays written by white male Englishmen, and work which looked critically at contemporary Britain.

Hare is correct in stating that Lewenstein had a strong interest in political plays that did not have an English focus. Lewenstein clearly made a determined and particular effort to champion playwrights native to former British colonies, who were inspired to write by their personal experience of that society and of the postcolonial state. Their interpretation and experience of colonialism was valued by Lewenstein. His recognition of the importance of the outsider’s voice was an approach in step with the broad trends in theatre at that time. As has been shown, a key difference between the works of the female and subaltern playwrights, and the works of the young writers at the Court, was that the former had been personally and directly affected by the politics and situations they chose to write about,

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<sup>140</sup> Although ‘Third World’ is considered a patronising and mildly offensive phrase today, it was in common, accepted and encouraged use at the time of interview.

whilst the relationship of the latter group to their subject matter was indirect and removed. Lewenstein programmed political work and he particularly favoured political work by those most affected by the politics in question, which at the time of the demise of the British Empire, was the postcolonial state. He also displayed an interest in drama that linked to the rise in feminism and gender politics and the challenges facing women in contemporary society. Therefore, Lewenstein frequently opted to give a direct platform to writers representing these demographics, rather than promote the indirect considerations on these topics, of white middle-class Englishmen. Lewenstein did programme the emerging English playwrights of the 1970s, but he endeavored not to provide them with disproportionate favour over female playwrights or playwrights from the former colonies. This stance reflects Lewenstein's personal ethos and it was an approach which chimed with the most recent trends in theatre making of that era.

### 3.4 Lewenstein and *The Rocky Horror Show*

Lewenstein was also somewhat open to alternative theatre and he memorably programmed British-New Zealander playwright Richard O'Brien's *Rocky Horror Show* (1973). Considering its later fame, it is salutary to note that *The Rocky Horror Show* was Lewenstein's discovery. It was his business nous that identified the show's potential, to the extent that he invested personally in its further life. Wright recalls:

There was a director, a young Australian, Jim Sherman who had directed *Jesus Christ, Superstar* but wanted to do more theatre work of a more *avant garde* nature. He brought in Richard O'Brien who proposed this show. Oscar was enthusiastic and Jim did a marvellous production which has been repeated around the world in a rather coarsened form ever since. We put up the posters and the tickets went like hot cakes. We knew we had done something right, we just didn't know what. Oscar reputedly invested in its life after the Court and did well out of it.<sup>141</sup>

Lewenstein's championing of *The Rocky Horror Show*, which is still regularly performed today, is also notable for its absence from the fore of later publications on the Court, at least not in the manner attention is accorded to *Look Back in Anger*, *Top Girls* or *Blasted*. This

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<sup>141</sup> Nicholas Wright, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Notting Hill, London.

neglect in turn raises further questions regarding the portrayal of the Lewenstein years, and adds to the general sense that there was something amiss in relation to scholarship on Lewenstein's tenure at the Court – and the manner in which the Court markets itself.

*The Rocky Horror Show* is a work highly influenced by alternative theatre and one which daringly explores gender fluidity. Even if this form of theatre did not appeal directly to his personal tastes, Lewenstein was astute enough to recognise before anyone else that the politics of the show were in step with contemporary trends and he appreciated its subversive appeal. Thus, he saw a commercial potential in alternative theatre before anyone else (Findlater, 1981: 230). These are not the actions of an Artistic Director who is resisting the new, the *avant garde*, or refusing to support an emerging generation.

### **3.5 The Lewenstein era is conflated with the predecessor and successor periods**

The lack of academic attention accorded to Lewenstein has been exacerbated by a common ambiguity as to how distinct his tenure was to that of his predecessors in the triumvirate. There is a broad-stroke tendency to refer to the 'early 1970s', which has come to mean the years between Gaskill and the co-directorship of Wright and Kidd. Hare's biography is a case in point, and it is important to consider his comments here considering the weight Hare's perception has previously carried in scholarship. Herein, the playwright dismissively refers to Lewenstein as a 'stopgap Artistic Director' and derisively describes him as a 'sometime communist who had hit gold producing the Woodfall film of Fielding's *Tom Jones*' (Hare, 2015: 175). Hare does not provide specific dates for the change in directorship and vaguely mentions that the triumvirate 'some time in 1972 had disappeared quarrelling into the distance' (ibid). Hare repeats again that there was a lack of support for the work of emergent writers in the 1970s (Hare, 2015: 159). In a 2017 Court podcast interview with Simon Stephens, Hare further claims that it was only in 1975, when Wright and Kidd as co-Artistic Directors programmed his play *Teeth n'Smiles* (1975), that the Court finally, 'came up to date. It was after that they began to put on Brenton and all the

rest'.<sup>142</sup> Hare makes no mention by name of the Lewenstein period, or the fact that Brenton's play *Magnificence* (1973) had been produced on the main stage during Lewenstein's tenure. Nor indeed does he mention that his own work was programmed on a number of occasions at the Court previous to *Teeth n' Smiles*, as were the plays of his contemporaries Wilson, Whitehead, Edgar and Griffiths, although some of these plays were collaborative projects. Most significant is Hare's assertion that it was the production of his 1975 play that brought the Court 'up to date'. This statement contradicts a claim Hare made in his 2016 autobiography in which he finally praises the Court for 'regaining' its soul by programming *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* (1973), but still does not mention Lewenstein by name. In this section, Hare also credits Wright with producing *The Rocky Horror Show* and is pleased when Wright and Kidd, whom he does name, take over artistic control in 1975. Hare states that their 'first priority was to try and win back all the writers the Royal Court had managed to alienate' (Hare, 2015: 242). It seems that there remains an impulse on the part of the emergent 1970s playwrights, even today, to obfuscate and occlude the Lewenstein contribution to Court history.

A result of downplaying Lewenstein's positive contribution to Court history is that it enables the achievements of other directorships to appear more significant. A case in point is that of Stafford-Clark, the Artistic Director of the Court throughout the 1980s, the figure whose efforts to foster the female voice at the institution have been most widely applauded and recorded by scholarship. The inattentiveness of scholars towards Lewenstein's advances in this area have allowed Stafford-Clark's later championing of the female presence on the Court's programme to seem all the more progressive. A more rigorous inspection of Lewenstein's facilitation of female playwrights at the Court, shows that he had paved the way for Stafford-Clark's later advancement and that Lewenstein's efforts at least equalled those of Stafford-Clark, and in some respects were more impressive.

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<sup>142</sup> David Hare interviewed by Simon Stephens for the Royal Court Theatre Podcast series, 2017. See <https://royalcourttheatre.com/podcasts/> [accessed February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017].

### 3.6 Lewenstein and the female voice at the Court

Lewenstein programmed Caryl Churchill's first stage production at the Court, with her Orton-inspired play *Owners* (1972) in the Theatre Upstairs, and later *Objections to Sex and Violence* (1975) in the Theatre Downstairs and a further Sunday night performance in the Theatre Upstairs of *Moving Clocks Go Slow* (1975). In addition, he appointed Jellicoe as Literary Manager, and oversaw the staging of *Two Jelliplays* (1974). Lewenstein introduced Mary O'Malley's work to the Court with *A Nevolent Society* (1975). It should be noted that O'Malley's was also a voice representing two immigrant groups, inasmuch as she was an English writer from an Irish and Lithuanian background and her family hailed from the immigrant communities of East London (Findlater, 1981: 218-234).

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Court, admittedly like the majority of mainstream institutions of the era, was conspicuously male and patriarchal. It was run by men and privileged and the theatre favoured writing by men. In Court history, a notorious example of this misogyny occurred when Gaskill decided to take a sabbatical to direct elsewhere in 1969; the heir apparent, the director Jane Howell, was proposed as his replacement, but her appointment was rejected by the council in favour of Page (Roberts, 1999: 120). Court playwright Jellicoe directly blamed the pro-male culture of the era and says of this episode 'Jane should have taken over the theatre, but she was passed over and thus left the Court' (Doty, Harbin, 1990: 159). Jellicoe herself was one of the few female playwrights at the Court during the 1960s and felt that being a woman was an 'immense disadvantage' during those years (ibid). As an illustration of misogynistic attitudes of the era, Jellicoe recalls being offended by an incident in which Devine disrespectfully and publicly referred to her relationship with playwright and director Keith Johnstone, which the couple had not yet made public, in a demeaning fashion:

Somebody complained to George that I was being a bit troublesome. Like for instance, I wanted a pink wall instead of a green one, and George said, 'Oh, just say to her, "Shut up, you silly woman, Keith will screw you later"' (Doty, Harbin, 1990:159)



Such attitudes are hallmarks of a patriarchal culture, and a further example of the traditional habitus, the accepted norm at the Court in these years. In contrast to Jellicoe, Churchill asserts that when she came to the Court as Resident Dramatist on Lewenstein's invitation, she did not feel it was a disadvantage at all to be female, which suggests that Lewenstein's tenure was beginning to influence the habitus, as were the times (Doty, Harbin, 1990: 158). Feminist issues were by now prominent in the public consciousness and part of the public discourse, but the Court also had a new Artistic Director who was embracing this change. In appointing Churchill as Resident Dramatist, Jenkins as General Manager and Jellicoe as Literary Manager, Lewenstein was telegraphing that a new attitude to the female role was now at the Court. These hirings were made consciously with female promotion in mind: Lewenstein claims that all of these appointments constituted the first time any significant positions were entrusted to women at the Court (Lewenstein, 1994: 147).<sup>143</sup> Lewenstein's action in placing women in key Court positions also facilitated the further emergence of female talent. For her part, Jellicoe recalls that she specifically kept a keen eye out for female writers of note: 'I found three, among them Mary O'Malley who wrote *Once a Catholic* (1977)' (Devine, H. 2006: 180). Lewenstein programmed O'Malley's first play, *A Nevolent Society* (1975) in the Theatre Upstairs, and her milestone play *Once a Catholic* was produced on the main stage two years later with Wright and Kidd as co-Artistic Directors at the Court. It is notable also that, when Lewenstein wrote to Howarth to inquire if he would be interested in taking over Jellicoe's position as she intended to leave, he offers Howarth the same salary the Court was paying Jellicoe.<sup>144</sup>

The Court had not hitherto ignored female dramatists, but they had been conspicuously under-represented in the sixteen years between the institution's founding in 1956 and July, 1972, when Lewenstein became Artistic Director. Programme evidence, cross checked from the two comprehensive lists of plays programmed at the Court that are

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<sup>143</sup> Harriet Devine had spent a year carrying out the duties of a Literary Manager in the late 1960s. Note that at that time there was no specific title for the position beyond that of a script reader.

<sup>144</sup> Letter from Lewenstein to Howarth, dated Dec. 6<sup>th</sup> 1974, Donald Howarth's personal archive, Lower Mall, Hammersmith.

published in both Browne and Findlater, reveals that, during his directorship, Lewenstein almost doubled the percentage of female contribution to Court programming. Stafford-Clark also, and as is widely reported, progressed the allocation of female writing during his artistic directorship of the Court in the 1980s; he claims to have upped the percentage of female playwrights to some 40%.<sup>145</sup> This is an exaggerated figure: in fact, programme evidence demonstrates it was 29%, as is also noted by Little and McLaughlin. Nonetheless, this percentage remains a commendable figure (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 238). As a result, Stafford-Clark's move to empower the female voice at the Court has come to overshadow the efforts made by Lewenstein during his tenure to the point of their near erasure from the received narrative. Edgar provides an example of this viewpoint in his 2006 interview with Harriet Devine:

I think that the theatre finally caught up when Max Stafford-Clark took over. Max started off with the women dramatists. He realised that was what was happening, and that's what he did.' (2006, H. Devine: 101)

Lewenstein's advancement of the female voice at the Court was impressive for its time. It chimed with broader strides in 1970s theatre to champion female playwrights; it should be recognised, furthermore, that Lewenstein achieved this advance during a more residually patriarchal decade. Arguably, Stafford-Clark's progressions in the field were facilitated by Lewenstein's seed sowing.

To appreciate the extent of Lewenstein's actions in this arena, it is useful firstly to consider the quantity of female plays programmed at the Court between 1956-1972 and to compare this figure with those then programmed during Lewenstein's era. From the founding of the Court up until Lewenstein's launch as Artistic Director, only 6.5% of work programmed at the Court was by women, including main stage, and Sunday nights, without *décor* and productions in the Theatre Upstairs (Findlater, 1981: 202-234; Browne, 1975: 109-111). During Lewenstein's short reign that figure rose swiftly to 13%. In the sixteen

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<sup>145</sup> Max Stafford-Clark, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Out of Joint Offices, Finsbury Park, London.

years between the launch of the Court and Lewenstein's reign, only eight plays by female playwrights, from an overall total of 193 plays, were programmed on the main bill: *The Member of the Wedding* (1950) by Carson McCullers, *The Sport of My Mad Mother* (1958), *The Knack* (1962) and *Shelly* (1966) by Anne Jellicoe, *Dear Augustine* (1958) by Alison McLeod, *The Lion in Love* (1960) by Shelagh Delaney, *Rats Mess* (1966) by Adrienne Kennedy and *Lovers Viorne* (1968) by Marguirite Duras (Findlater, 1981: 202-234; Browne, 1975: 109-111). Female-authored works thus comprised 4% of the *main* bill. In Lewenstein's three years, the percentage of programmed plays by females on the main stage rose to 7%. By today's standards, this is pitiful representation, yet for its time it was a significant and sharp increase and one for which Lewenstein is not given due credit in scholarship. It is salutary to note that, in the years that followed Lewenstein's tenure, 1975-1980, only two plays by women were to grace the main stage, at 4.25% of programmed work, and the two female playwrights whose work did show on the main stage in these years were Churchill and O'Malley, both of whom were first given a platform at the Court by Lewenstein.<sup>146</sup> One of the first plays Lewenstein programmed was the Irish playwright O'Brien's *A Pagan Place* (1972), a play he admired significantly as he later brought this work to the screen. Page also greatly admired O'Brien's play, writing to Robin Dalton in 1971, 'I shall certainly push very hard at Bill about this once *Lear* has opened and I would love to talk to Edna about it, at any time'.<sup>147</sup> Although in later correspondence, Page concedes that they have no space for it on the bill, he suggested that Lewenstein, not yet the Court's Artistic Director, might be able to arrange a production in Dublin.<sup>148</sup> Howarth recalls Lewenstein providing O'Brien with an office in Goodwin's Court and believes he funded it himself to afford O'Brien the time and space to write an adaptation of her source-material novel.

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<sup>146</sup> These figures were arrived at by cross checking the collated lists of programmed shows at the Court published in both Findlater and Browne.

<sup>147</sup> English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/4/1/95)

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*

Churchill's connection with the Court is very often associated with the time of Stafford-Clark, which is understandable to a degree as he directed her most celebrated plays *Cloud 9* (1979) and *Top Girls* (1982). It was Lewenstein, in fact, who first gave a platform to this unknown radio dramatist who had not been encouraged by previous Artistic Directors. During his directorship at the Court, Lewenstein programmed Churchill's work both in the Theatre Upstairs and later on the main bill. Her standing today as one of Britain's foremost playwrights needs little exposition, yet Lewenstein's role in her promotion merits closer attention.

Lewenstein programmed Churchill's *Owners*, her first full-length stage play, in November 1972, in the Theatre Upstairs. Lewenstein later admitted he did not admire her work as much as his colleagues did as he saw her as part of the middle-class set whose political sincerity he held in suspicion. The fact that he included Churchill on the bill therefore, demonstrates that, contrary to claims, Lewenstein was willing to give the emerging 1970s playwrights space on the programme and, crucially, and somewhat revealing of his own agenda, he admitted he specifically chose Churchill because he was keen to bring the female voice to the Court:

I programmed Caryl because she was a woman and playwright and there were not too many of them. We all thought she should be encouraged and the best way to encourage an author is to produce his or, in this case, her work. (Lewenstein, 1994: 151)

The tardiness with which the Court came to support Churchill is reflective of the patriarchal world of the era and specifically, the dominant male culture at the Court. Churchill was in her mid-thirties before her work was shown at the Court. She had been a contemporary of McGrath and Rudkin at Oxford and likewise had been active as a student playwright. As was typical of the female route of the era, while her male contemporaries went on to a career in stage and T.V., Churchill married and had children, writing for radio as a sideline. This slower incubation period allowed for a unique voice to mature and, when Lewenstein programmed her first full length stage production, it signaled and enabled the arrival of an original talent, which Stafford-Clark allowed to come to the fore in the 1980s.

Churchill's early Court plays look at women surviving in a male culture. *Owners* concerns patriarchy, capitalism, greed and acquisitiveness and astutely anticipates the property boom, enrichment, subsequent property obsession and to a certain extent the Thatcherism that would soon become entrenched in British life. Refracted through the optics of feminism, *Owners* juxtaposes the male and female associated traits of aggressiveness and passivity respectively, and reveals them to be neither exclusively male nor female. *Owners* implies that a masculine approach is necessary in a patriarchal world for a woman to achieve success and to acquire possessions. Churchill presents the lead female character, 'Marion', as an acquisitive business woman who buys up houses from the vulnerable and even tries to acquire a baby in a similar manner. There are strong seeds in this play for one of her most famous creations, 'Marlene' in *Top Girls*. Even the name suggests 'Marion' is something of a precursor to 'Marlene'. Marion's world view is of a similar ilk: 'Be clean, be quick, be top, be best, you may not succeed, Marion but what matters is you try your hardest' (Churchill, 1985: 30).

Churchill's subsequent play at the Court, *Objections to Sex and Violence* (1975), showed on the main stage, where it opened in January 1975. The play was written and produced during an era of growing terrorist threat, in the shadow of the Munich bombings and the rise of violent splinter groups such as the Red Brigade. This play investigates a world of terrorism and the woman's role therein. Churchill uses this play to examine the survival methods a woman may use in a violent culture. Churchill juxtaposes two couples, Jule and Eric, who are involved in a terrorist campaign, and the very middle-class Madge and Arthur, a civil servant married to a man with a pornography habit who is disgusted by his own urges. Jule in contrast, is hard, aggressive, manipulative, violent, sex-driven and is not above using her sexuality to exploit. *Objections to Sex and Violence* considers the cost to a woman of having to thrive in a man's world. Both these plays speak directly to the female experience and explore the challenges facing a woman in a traditional male environment, both situations of which Churchill had direct experience. Hesitant though he was about her talent, Lewenstein conceded this was an 'interesting work', but noted it lost

£9,500, implying he was more concerned with the financial aspect of the play than admiring of Churchill's skill as a dramatist. Notwithstanding his reservations, the principal point is that Lewenstein provided a prominent platform for Churchill's work and was the first Artistic Director of the Court to do so (Lewenstein, 1994: 151).

### 3.7 Lewenstein and non-white representation at the Court

If Lewenstein's time at the Court is allocated attention at all in the received narrative, it is for his 'South African Season', or the trilogy of anti-apartheid plays co-written by white South African playwright Fugard and the black actors Kani and Ntshona. The Court had programmed work by black writers before, most notably and conspicuously in the late 1950s with Barry Reckord, Errol John and later Matura, and for this reason, in comparison with other London stages it was considered progressive in this regard. Sloane Square had additionally also shown Jean Genet's 'whiteface play', *The Blacks*, in 1961. The experiences of non-white South Africans living under apartheid were further explored in Fugard's *Boesman and Lena* in 1971. In the latter play, Fugard, a white south African who would later return to the Court on Lewenstein's invitation for the South African season, considers how apartheid affects the wider South African community. Trinidadian playwright Matura's play *As Time Goes By* (1971) was programmed at the Theatre Upstairs in 1972, before Lewenstein assumed artistic control. Although the appearance of plays concerning the black experience was significant for its time, in terms of percentage of stage allocation, there was very little non-white representation at the Court when compared with stage time given to whites.

Of the 336 productions shown at the Court between its launch and Lewenstein's tenure as Artistic Director, 19 were penned by non-white playwrights, or 5.6% of the overall programme. Of the 193 shows that were billed on the main stage, seven, or 3.6%, were written by non-white playwrights.<sup>149</sup> Under Lewenstein's direction, non-white plays at the

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<sup>149</sup> These figures were arrived at by cross checking the collated lists of programmed shows at the Court published in both Findlater and Browne.

Court increased to 13% of the overall programme and 6.6% of shows on the main stage (Findlater, 1981: 202-234; Browne, 1975: 109-111). Lewenstein therefore doubled non-white representation during his tenure. Plays by non-white playwrights programmed on Lewenstein's watch comprised: *Give the Gaffer Time to Love You* (1973) and *X* (1974) by Barry Reckord, *Sweet Talk* (1973) by Michael Abbensetts, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972) and *The Island* (1972) by Fugard, Kani and Ntshona, *Play Mas* (1973) and *Black Slave, White Chains* (1975) by Mustapha Matura and *The City* (1975) by Yutaka Higashi. He also installed Abbensetts as Resident Dramatist.

In his own memoirs, Lewenstein considers *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972), 'perhaps the most important play' staged during his time as Artistic Director (Lewenstein, 1994:157).

Speaking of his relationship with Lewenstein Fugard recalls:

I think it is highly unlikely that there would have been a South African Season without Oscar. I cannot remember any other Royal Court presence that made such an active commitment to the plays that led to the season. I cannot for the life of me remember how *Boesman and Lena* landed up in the Theatre Upstairs. I cannot even remember who was responsible for *Boesman and Lena* going to the Court. If Bill Gaskill was at the Court at that time, then that would explain its presence in the Theatre Upstairs. Because Bill was also a friend of my work, having seen my production of Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*. But Oscar's commitment was of a different order.<sup>150</sup>

Lewenstein had first encountered Fugard's work when *Boesman and Lena* was presented in the Theatre Upstairs in 1971, a play that later transferred to the Young Vic (Little, McLaughlin, 2010: 170-171). It was *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, however, that launched the South African season at the Court in 1973 and which established Fugard's reputation in the UK. This is the first play of a trilogy and was in fact co-written by Fugard with the black actors Kani and Ntshona in 1972. Howarth remembers viewing its premiere in South Africa:

I saw *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* in Capetown behind locked doors with 200 other people. We all got to our feet to applaud for minutes when it was over. After the performance, I talked to Athol asking for a script to send to Oscar. There wasn't one as the play had been improvised. I said I would transcribe the recording. It didn't happen so I wrote anyway to Oscar saying he didn't need to read it, just schedule it and put it on the main stage as it was.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>150</sup> Athol Fugard, unpublished interview with Sue Healy via email, 21<sup>st</sup> Feb. 2017.

<sup>151</sup> Donald Howarth, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, Sept. 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Lower Mall, Hammersmith, London.

The other Court figure in the audience that evening was David Lan who later made a similar case to Nicholas Wright. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* had been bravely created in an oppressive climate where interaction between whites and blacks was severely restricted and even audiences were segregated.<sup>152</sup> The debut of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* at Brian Astbury and Yvonne Bryceland's fringe Space Theatre in Capetown had an audience of 200 liberal whites, who had to be locked-in for the duration. Following Howarth's urging, which was later underscored by Wright, Lewenstein subsequently programmed the South African trilogy which went on to become a Court classic.

Fugard, a white South African of Africaner, English, Irish and French extraction, who was already a respected playwright, devised *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* (1974) with the black actors Kani and Ntshona, drawing on their specific experiences of apartheid. The play is also loosely inspired by Fugard's work as a law clerk at the Native Commissioner's Court where he witnessed the alarming rate of incarceration of blacks. The play concerns a photographer who helps the character of Sizwe Bansi to assume the identity of a dead man in order to obtain a passport and find work; therefore, Sizwe Bansi must fake his death and take someone else's name so that he can obtain that document, and have a chance to survive in a country that limits freedom of movement and work opportunities for blacks.

Lewenstein initially wanted to show the play on the main stage. When Fugard visited the theatre, he felt the play would be more at home in the intimate environs of the Theatre Upstairs. Nonetheless, it is a mark of the investment Lewenstein had in the work that he was keen to programme this controversial work in the Theatre Downstairs:

From the very outset [Lewenstein] became the Godfather to our work. I think it was his hope that my plays would help shake English audiences out of their complacent assumptions about South Africa... Oscar was quite simply the best friend my work had. He had a spirit which matched ours. We were trying to wake up a sleeping

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<sup>152</sup> There was censorship of all media in South Africa during the apartheid era. Media was largely used for government propaganda. Theatre was the remaining arena which could subtly engage with dissent. Howarth, who lived in South Africa for some years in the early 1970s, wrote a provocative anti-apartheid version of *Othello* for whites only, *Othello Slegs Blankes* (1972), which provided the Shakespearian drama minus the protagonist as mixed-race productions were prohibited.



society and so was Oscar.<sup>153</sup>

*Sizwe Bansi is Dead* opened in the Theatre Upstairs on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 1973, toured and did eventually move Downstairs for the milestone South African season by Fugard directed by the playwright, in January 1974 (Brown, 1975: 96). It played at 93% of capacity and transferred to the West End and later to the US, where actors Kani and Ntshona won a Tony Award. Lewenstein further permitted the ANC and anti-apartheid campaigners to hand out pamphlets outside the theatre. Lewenstein was yoking his political leanings to the programme of the theatre. Kani also recalled the welcome and support they received: ‘the Court had a special pride in productions and they made us aware that our presence here was a special event’ (Little, McLaughlin, 2007: 171).

Lewenstein’s promotion of other work by non-whites has not received the attention that the South African season has, but there were other milestones during his tenure at the Court. Matura’s play *Play Mas* (1975), directed by Howarth, which showed during Lewenstein’s tenure in the Theatre Upstairs, makes for an interesting contrast with *West of Suez* (1971), the Osborne threnody to empire. *Play Mas* is similarly set on an island transitioning towards independence. It focuses on the years leading up to Trinidad’s break with Britain, employs the spirit of Caribbean carnival, and deals with the indigenous power wrangles, rather than dwelling on the fate of the former colonists, as Osborne’s play had. Set in a tailor shop, the first act relays the relationship between the mixed-race tailor Ramjohn, his mother and their assistant Samuel. The play examines their aspirations as independence from the British looms. The carnival ‘masquerade’ or ‘mas’, and the fact that the play is set in a tailor’s, or costumier’s, allows the play to look metaphorically at presentation, image and the exterior and how that contrasts with what lies beneath.

The use of patois elevates the poetry of the Trinidadian dialect and validates it as a language. Samuel welcomes a group of people into the police station, presenting two performers dressed as undertakers for the upcoming carnival ‘a do tink yer no dese two

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<sup>153</sup> Athol Fugard, unpublished interview with Sue Healy via email, Feb. 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017.

fellars'.<sup>154</sup> Trinidad and the impact of independence is illuminated through a carnival lens. Costumes present guises contrasting with the truth beneath. A suit demonstrates power but has little influence in reality. This is a play with a comic skein and an aggressive undercurrent. The 'mas' warps reality. Samuel, fired by Ramjohn, returns with a pistol, revealed as a prank. After independence, Samuel is the Police Commissioner with a big desk and wearing the suit he once dreamed of. Power is subverted, and lies with the women, mother or wife, their voices insistent, shouting commands. *The Daily Express*' senior drama critic Herbert Kretzmer refers to the play as a 'tale of a buffoon's rise to power' and describes it in his positive review as 'a drama that deftly dissects a multi-racial society in a state of political ferment against a background of jollity, folklore and seductive tropical music'.<sup>155</sup> *The Financial Times*' drama critic B.A. Young writes: 'There may be some to whom the concealed pill in Mr Matura's play may seem somewhat bitter, but the jam is of the highest quality'.<sup>156</sup> In the *London Evening Standard* review, the critic Milton Shulman comments, somewhat patronisingly, 'If Mr. Matura can be credited with something so pompous as a message, he is probably trying to say that simple people who love only to play games and fantasize are corrupted by the temptations of economic growth and the trappings of political power'.<sup>157</sup> In this play, Matura reveals that, despite posturing, disguises, costumes and masks, there are always hierarchies and always power struggles in all human societies. The play did well, transferred to the Phoenix Theatre in the West End and won the *Evening Standard Award* for Most Promising Playwright for Matura.

Further illustrating Lewenstein's interest in non-white plays are a series of letters from 1971-1975 in the English Stage Company archives from Lewenstein to the American producer Woodie King and other New York based theatre industry figures regarding LeRoi

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<sup>154</sup> Original rehearsal script, Act II, Scene II, p. 2. Donald Howarth's personal archive, Lower Mall, Hammersmith, London.

<sup>155</sup> *The Daily Express* July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1974 review of *Play Mas*, Donald Howarth's personal archive, Lower Mall, Hammersmith.

<sup>156</sup> *The Financial Times* July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1974 review of *Play Mas*, Donald Howarth's personal archive, Lower Mall, Hammersmith.

<sup>157</sup> *The London Evening Standard* July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1974 review of *Play Mas*, Donald Howarth's personal archive, Lower Mall, Hammersmith.

Jones' Obie Award-winning Chelsea Theatre play *Slave Ship* (1970). Lewenstein was keen to programme the play for a six-week run at the Court, although the staging logistics would ultimately prove too expensive for the Sloane Square theatre.<sup>158</sup> The minutes of the Artistic Committee for September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1973, record that Lewenstein initially proposed a seven-week season of the Fugard trilogy, *Play Mas* and *Slave Ship*. At the same meeting, he also encouraged the committee to reconsider *The Gathering* a previously rejected play by O'Brien. Of note for this thesis is that fact that Lewenstein also proposed that the committee consider *Brassneck* by Brenton and Hare, saying that Court people had seen it in Nottingham and reported favourably on it.<sup>159</sup>

Wright posits that it was the philosophies in the subaltern plays that particularly interested and impressed Lewenstein: 'Oscar responded to [Fugard's play, *Sizwe Bansi*] politically' (Doty, Harbin, 1990: p.60). For his part, the playwright, Fugard recalls his relationship with Lewenstein:

Oscar was responsible without any question for my play moving from the Theatre Upstairs for a further limited run to the Young Vic. And that was the start of a very important relationship for me. I just trusted that man, and he trusted me to a degree that is always bewildering. (Findlater, 1981: 157)

Given Lewenstein's own cultural background, his political convictions, his left-wing allegiances and his belief that the Court has a responsibility to promote work that would not otherwise be heeded, it is unsurprising that he fostered subaltern voices during his tenure.

As he was to later remark:

Apart from continuing our work with past Royal Court Writers, it was essential to find new ones and to make the main stage of the Court available to talented writers who had previously only had their plays produced in the Theatre Upstairs or on a Sunday Night. (Lewenstein, 1994: 147)

Accordingly, although Lewenstein has had his detractors, it is the non-white and the Irish and the female who most warmly recall Lewenstein's tenure. West Indian dramatist, Matura remembers Lewenstein's support during this period: 'The success of [*Play Mas*] had

<sup>158</sup> English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/4/13/2).

<sup>159</sup> English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/1/6/1).

a lot to do with Oscar's personality. I think he was a wonderful influence at the Court' (Findlater, 1981: 162).

### 3.8 Lewenstein and Irish representation at the Court

The Court has been particularly associated with Irish drama since the 1990s and both the Court and Irish drama have been mutually enriched from this close collaboration. Irish playwrights and Irish plays have provided the Sloane Square theatre with some of its most notable works in more recent times and Irish drama has found a wider, international audience due to Court support. In recent years, Dublin's Abbey Theatre and the Court have partnered on a number of successful co-productions such as *Cyprus Avenue* (2016) by the Northern Irish playwright David Ireland. In 2017, the English playwright Jez Butterworth's *The Ferryman* (2017), directed by Sam Mendes, which is set in rural Derry and concerns the Troubles, became the fastest selling production in Court history and transferred to the West End months before its launch; when it opened in April 2017, it received across-the-board acclaim from British critics; (the production of this play will be examined more closely in the Conclusion).

The close relationship between the Court and Irish drama is generally traced to the mid-1990s and Daldry's artistic directorship. This was a time when, in association with Galway's Druid Theatre, the Court co-produced the Tony Award-winning *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1996) by Martin McDonagh, directed by Garry Hynes and starring Anna Manahan. This highly successful play was one of a flurry which came from Britain's neighbouring island and included *The Weir* by Conor McPherson (1997) and *The Steward of Christendom* (1995) by Sebastian Barry. It was an era when talents such as Marina Carr and Enda Walsh were championed by the Court, at a time when these playwrights' work was not receiving due attention from Ireland's national theatre, the Abbey. Today, so synonymous is Irish theatre with the Court that, in recent times, the Sloane Square theatre has been viewed as the most welcoming destination for Irish playwrights looking to stage work on an international platform.

It is surprising to discover, therefore, that the Court failed to produce a single play from a native Irish Catholic for the first thirteen years of its existence, despite talents such as Behan, Friel, John B. Keane, Kilroy, Hugh Leonard and Murphy rising and being fêted internationally during this period. Finally, in 1969, Murphy's *Famine* (1968) transferred from the Abbey for a single Sunday Night production at the Court. No more work by native Irish Catholics appeared until the Theatre Upstairs' production of *Within Two Shadows* (1972) by Wilson John Haire in April, 1972.

Lewenstein's decision to programme three plays by native Irish Catholic playwrights in quick succession, following sixteen years of near-exclusion from the Court, is too determined and bold a move to be co-incidental, unplanned or unwitting. The action signalled a sea-change regarding the type of work the Court would facilitate and promote during Lewenstein's tenure. The Irish plays he programmed immediately upon assuming his directorship in the autumn of 1972 were: *Richard's Cork Leg* (1962) by Behan, *A Pagan Place* (1972) by O'Brien, both of which showed on the main stage, and *Eye Winker, Tom Tinker* (1972) by Tom Mac Intyre which was produced in the Theatre Upstairs. In subsequent years, Lewenstein went on to produce at the Court: *Freedom of the City* (1973) by Friel on the main stage, and another play from the Belfast writer Wilson John Haire in the Theatre Upstairs, *Echoes from a Concrete Canyon* (1975). This action helped to provide native Irish theatre with validation and attention that it had not previously enjoyed to a great degree beyond the island of Ireland.

That the Court was so conspicuously slow in presenting native Irish work reveals a surprising attitude to Ireland, Britain's neighbour and former colony with which it continued to have a fraught relationship. The Court's inattention towards native Irish Catholic work contrasts greatly with that of Littlewood at Stratford East, who had supported and championed the works of Behan and Murphy throughout the 1960s. The Court, in comparison, was prolifically programming works by Anglo-Irish playwrights, an ethnic

group with deep ancestral and cultural ties to England, but until Lewenstein took over the reins, the Court had displayed little appetite for work by native Irish playwrights.<sup>160</sup>

Of the 336 plays staged at the Court from its inception to Lewenstein's tenure, only two of these plays were by a native Irish Catholic playwrights and, as mentioned previously,

Murphy's play ran for a single performance only. The Court conspicuously programmed the

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<sup>160</sup> Beyond Ireland, there remains some understandable confusion regarding the terms 'Irish' and 'Anglo-Irish'. It is a ambiguity that can possibly be lent some clarification by regarding the two giants of twentieth century Irish letters, Joyce and Beckett. Dubliner Joyce was Irish. His family were Gaels, native to Ireland, and like his forebears Joyce was raised a Roman Catholic. He lived the majority of his life in exile, but consistently wrote about Ireland. Despite years of residency in France and Italy, Joyce is never considered anything but Irish. This recognition of his Irishness sits in contrast with that of his *protégé* and secretary in Paris, Beckett. The latter has been referred to in scholarship as a 'detrified Irishman' (Watson: 1986). This is a term with mildly derogatory connotations, but most significantly, it highlights Watson's ignorance of the architecture and constituencies of Irish society; Beckett was not 'detrified' because he was not of the Irish 'tribe' to which the author refers. Unlike Joyce, Beckett was of Anglo-Irish descent and as such, sprung from a society far closer and more culturally familiar and ethnically linked to the white male Protestant English management at the Court, than that of Joyce, Behan, Friel, Murphy, Kilroy, O'Brien and Keane.

The Anglo-Irish have contributed greatly to Irish drama and their ranks include: William Congreve, Jonathan Swift, John Millington Synge, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, C.S. Lewis, George Farquhar, Oliver Goldsmith, Dion Boucicault and W.B. Yates. 'Anglo-Irish' is a term used primarily to describe the descendants of English settlers who arrived in Ireland following the Cromwellian invasions of the mid-seventeenth century. Pre-independence, they once comprised some 10% of the population of Ireland, a figure which had dropped to 2% by mid-twentieth century, with many of their ranks having returned to Britain. Prior to independence in 1921, the Anglo-Irish were, for the most part, a privileged colonial social class, the overlords and the arm of the British Empire in Ireland, much like the Raj in India. They were almost exclusively Protestant (Anglican) and continued to favour and follow the British culture of their forebears over that of the native Irish. Their children were often educated in England, or in Protestant schools in Ireland which followed British cultural traditions, sports, heritage and customs and had an English and Protestant ethos. It was rare, although certainly not unheard of, for an Anglo-Irish person to take an interest in the Irish language, culture, sport, literature or society. Inter-marriage was even rarer. In this way, the two social groups, the native Irish and the Anglo-Irish, remained largely economically, socially, ethnically and culturally segregated. Accordingly, up until independence and even for some decades afterwards, the Anglo-Irish adhered to British and particularly English culture and customs, behaved and sounded 'English' to the native Irish, despite having lived in Ireland for generations. Prior to independence in 1921, the privileged position of the Anglo-Irish in Ireland meant that they were the most educated and powerful section of Irish society, held almost all the country's offices of influence, including the cultural institutions. Anglo-Irish writers tended to write from a British perspective and for a British audience. Their dominance of Irish letters up to and for a time after independence in 1921 is evident: W.B. Yates and Lady Augusta Gregory founders of the Abbey Theatre were both Anglo-Irish (though they were evidently deeply interested in native Irish culture). Tyrone Guthrie, the theatre impresario, is another example of Anglo-Irish prominence on the twentieth century theatrical landscape.

For further reading see Maguire, F. 'The Anglo-Irish', Cork: *University College Cork*, (2006) [https://web.archive.org/web/20060502065641/http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/The\\_Anglo-Irish](https://web.archive.org/web/20060502065641/http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/The_Anglo-Irish) [accessed February 10th, 2018].

See also Wolff, E. M. *An Anarchy in the Mind and in the Heart: Narrating Anglo-Ireland* (New Jersey: Cranbury, 2006).

Anglo-Irish.<sup>161</sup> Beckett saw seven of his plays at the Court between 1956-1972. There were four revivals of works by George Bernard Shaw, William Congreve and W.B. Yeats.

O'Casey's *Cock-a-Doodle-Andy* was programmed in 1959.<sup>162</sup> This was a significant representation for the Anglo-Irish at the Court, despite this demographic comprising a very tiny, and highly privileged, section of Irish society (some 2% of the Irish population by the mid-twentieth century). Their strong representation in Sloane Square can, to an extent, be explained by the fact that the white English middle-class and the Anglo-Irish shared such strong social, ethnic, religious, historical and cultural ties so as to be almost indistinguishable. Their similar developmental experiences also meant that it would have been a seamless transition for an Anglo-Irishman to become part of the Court's institutional habitus with its familiar dynamics and conventions. Equally, work by the Anglo-Irish was easily appreciated, its worldview, nuances and social references often readily understood by the Court's English establishment.

There was no ready empathy with work by the native Irish writers the Court was not supporting, including that by the playwrights: Kilroy, Behan, O'Brien, Friel, Murphy, Leonard and Keane. All were from a native Gael Irish background (which generally, but not exclusively, meant a Catholic background also). Their own shared ethnicity, world view and culture differed markedly from that of the English and therefore, the Court's tradition. The Court did not programme, at any time in its first thirteen years, a single piece of work from

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<sup>161</sup> These figures were arrived at by cross checking the collated lists of programmed shows at the Court published in both Findlater and Browne.

<sup>162</sup> The Anglo-Irish very rarely assimilated with the native Irish prior to independence. They did, slowly, begin to take a greater interest in native Irish culture following independence; or at least those who opted to stay in Ireland did so. Writers from an Anglo-Irish background began to look to the native Irish for inspiration. Synge dramatised the rural Irish story whilst O'Casey, who was born to an impoverished or shabby-genteel Anglo-Irish Protestant family, aligned himself with the native Irish urban working class. A committed socialist who had, very unusually for someone with an Anglo-Irish background, experienced significant poverty in his youth, O'Casey was not typical of those of Anglo-Irish descent. He appeared to feel more of a connection with the native Irish and especially the urban working-class. Born John Casey, he Gaelicised his name. Notwithstanding how he identified, the consistent anti-Catholicism in his writing led some, such as the writer George Moore, to suspect deeper sectarianist anti-Catholic motives and this aspect, coupled with his Anglo-Irish background, and that O'Casey spent the majority of his life living in Devon married to an Englishwoman, meant the extent of his Irishness was occasionally questioned. The critic Kenneth Tynan also commented in the 1960s 'we do well to remember O'Casey's Protestant upbringing when watching his late plays' (Moran, 2013: 134).

any of these writers or from anyone from their ethnic and cultural background, or take an interest in their work which explored from their own perspective the culture, traditions and experiences of the rural and urban native Irish who comprised over 90% of the population of the Republic. At the Court, their voice had remained as neglected, under-valued and less heeded as it had been during the years of British Empire.

As the British Empire weakened and British cultural influence waned world-wide, the native Irish voice began to find more confidence and greater attention both in Ireland, the US and, eventually, in Britain. Littlewood at Stratford East had championed Behan's *The Quare Fellow* and *The Hostage* in the 1950s. Lewenstein was producer on these plays and brought them very successfully to the West End. In contrast to the vast majority of their Anglo-Irish colleagues, these native Irish playwrights often came from families that had endured economic challenges and had experienced the difficulties of emigration and conflict as the country transited post-independence. Behan's work drew on his time spent incarcerated for IRA activities. The playwright's work had first showed in his native Dublin in 1954 at the Pike Theatre, and his success in London, and later New York, came in the early 1960s. He died of alcoholism in 1964, but it was not until eight years later, with Lewenstein as Artistic Director, that his work was to be presented at the Court. Another milestone in Irish drama which Littlewood championed when the Abbey in Dublin had rejected it, was the highly influential *Whistle in the Dark* (1961) by Tom Murphy, a play that explored violence in Irish immigrant communities in Britain. Murphy was the first person of a native Irish Catholic background to receive a platform at the Court, albeit some eight years after *Whistle in the Dark's* debut, and for a single night, with a production of *Famine* in the Theatre Upstairs in 1969. The play is set during the Great Hunger in the village of Glenconnor in 1846-1847. It transferred for that one performance from The Abbey, Ireland's national theatre. The native Irish absence on the Court's stage occurred despite, or perhaps even partly because of, the enormous immigration by Irish to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s and the eruption of 'the Troubles' in 1969. Considering the Court's previous inattention to work by native Irish Catholic writers, it is telling therefore that the



first three plays programmed by Lewenstein were works by this specific ethnic group, and two were given main stage productions. Lewenstein wanted the native Irish voice and experience brought to life in Sloane Square. All three playwrights were quite different and dealt with varying aspects of Irish culture, yet all were unmistakably Irish.

The first play Lewenstein programmed was *Richard's Cork Leg*. Before he had become Artistic Director, Lewenstein met his old friend Behan in Dublin and took an option on *Richard's Cork Leg*. Behan had died shortly afterwards, before it was finished. When Lewenstein became the Artistic Director at the Court, he decided to stage the work and approached Alan Simpson, the editor of Behan's complete plays; Simpson then used Behan's notes to complete the play and bring it to a production-ready version. The popular Irish folk band, the Dubliners, were also keen to play in the piece and Lewenstein programmed it.

As Matura's *Play Mas* would later do regarding Trinidadian culture, *Richard's Cork Leg* vaunts aspects of Irish culture that had not previously been recognised or appreciated outside those immigrant communities in the UK. Behan's play is an irreverent celebration of the same with its music, humour and songs of love, religion and politics, and was a characteristic postscript to Behan's earlier work as it was unapologetically raucous, surreal, and very Irish.

*Richard's Cork Leg* began life as a one-act play in Irish, *Lá Brea san Reilig* (*A Lovely Day in the Cemetery*). It presents in near music hall fashion a vortex of puns, politics, satire, music, parodies and speeches, all of which pivot on a touchstone of native Irish culture, the wake – a tradition where mourners sit with the corpse throughout the first night of their death and celebrate their life. *Richard's Cork Leg* provides prostitutes and revolutionaries and musicians, sex and song. Behan later translated the piece into English and retitled it *Ur-Cork Leg* but died before it was complete. The play's vaudeville character, the Hero, has echoes of Archie Rice, albeit a very Irish version. It is loosely structured around binaries: pitching Catholic against Protestant, English against Irish, Irish against

American, communist against fascist and it mocks extremism of any colour and relishes instead the joy of Irish culture, marching in tune with Behan's belief:

The music hall is the thing to aim at for, to amuse people and any time they get bored, divert them with a song or dance. I've always thought T.S. Eliot wasn't far wrong when he said that the main problem of the dramatist today was to keep his audience amused and that while they were laughing their heads off you could be up to any bloody thing behind their backs and it was what you were doing behind their bloody backs that made your play great. (Behan in O'Sullivan, 1999: 238)

Though this comment might appear a glib rejection of high art, Behan was all too aware of his more highbrow and respected literary forebears. The title itself is from an apocryphal comment Joyce had made when his play *The Exiles* was rejected, 'If I'd given Richard a Cork leg it might have been accepted'.<sup>163</sup> Lewenstein via Behan had moved Irish music and song from the immigrant pubs of Cricklewood and Kilburn, across town to Sloane Square and the intellectual's stage, and in this way evinced and encouraged a respect for Irish culture that had previously not been in great evidence in the UK. *Richard's Cork Leg* sold 76% of seats.<sup>164</sup>

On the heels of Behan's posthumous play, *Eye Winker, Tom Tinker* (1972) by Tom Mac Intyre opened in the theatre upstairs. A postcolonial comment on the appeal of revolution and the promises it holds, and breaks, this was a more serious play than Behan's. It relays the story of Shooks, an exiled revolutionary leader who returns to Ireland and galvanises his staff at headquarters with his charisma and dynamism, reviving the revolutionary movement but the fight never materialises. Shooks is scarred by the colonial destruction of the Irish language and the play is a comment on historical memory and inherited trauma. *Eye Winker, Tom Tinker* asks the audience to consider empty rhetoric and the improbability of commitment. It is a play that boldly examines the contemporary frustration in Ireland, and critically scrutinises Republican attitudes to the escalation of violence in Ulster.

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<sup>163</sup> Clinton, P. in *The Chicago Reader* February, 1991

See <https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/richards-cork-leg/Content?oid=877066> [accessed February 8th, 2018]

<sup>164</sup> An inventory of the percentage of seats sold titled 'Oscar Lewenstein First Year Royal Court', dated Dec. 27<sup>th</sup>, 1973. Donald Howarth's personal archive, Hammersmith.

Mac Intyre's play was followed by that of another native Irish Catholic writer, O'Brien's *A Pagan Place* (1972), which is essentially a coming-of-age story set in rural Ireland. In this instance, the focus is on the female experience in Ireland. O'Brien's play did well at the Court, selling 82% of seats.<sup>165</sup> The production received mixed reviews from the critics. The *Sunday Times*' Harold Hobson wrote enthusiastically on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1971:

A shining landscape of childhood's perilous happiness recollected in a troubled peace. If there is a better play than this in London, then London must be extremely lucky. A wake in an Irish public house, a picnic by the sea, a revival of an old passion when a doctor calls on a middle aged patient, a lesson by an eccentric schoolmistress, the conversation of a profligate priest with a young girl – Miss O'Brien makes of these apparently disconnected things a vision of life that is delicate and touching, illuminated by the light of a memory that is calmed but not assuaged.<sup>166</sup>

Lewenstein used the next few years to focus more on non-white writing at the Court. He returned to the subject of Ireland, and specifically 'the Troubles', in his final year as Artistic Director. Firstly, he programmed a Theatre Upstairs run of Wilson John Haire's *Echoes from a Concrete Canyon* (1975). Haire had been appointed Resident Dramatist by Lewenstein in 1974, having previously been only the second Irish Catholic to have a play programmed at the Court, in the Theatre Upstairs in 1972. Haire, from Belfast, had a unique background in that he was the son of a Catholic mother and a Protestant father. Presbyterian Protestants of Ulster were a different demographic from the Anglo-Irish Protestants of the Anglican faith elsewhere in Ireland. Although the Ulster Presbyterians were also of British descent and had also arrived with the Cromwellian invasions, in their case they were largely of northern English and Scottish extraction and they were a larger population within a concentrated area. There had been slightly more intermarriage between this ethnic group and the native Irish population than there had been between the Anglo-Irish and the native Irish, yet as a rule the Ulster Presbyterians had also not assimilated with the native Irish Catholics and they guarded their British roots and culture with rigour; sectarianism in Ulster was rife. The Ulster Presbyterians comprised a majority within Northern Ireland and

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> *Sunday Times*, Nov. 10<sup>th</sup>, 1971.

although still more socially privileged and powerful than their native Irish Catholic counterparts, they were largely working class or lower middle class.<sup>167</sup> Haire was raised in the Catholic faith of his mother but had Ulster Presbyterian relations and he experienced aggressive sectarianism as a child and was particularly qualified to write with an informed voice on the ethnic divisions in Ireland.

In February 1973, Lewenstein produced on the Court's mainstage Friel's *The Freedom of the City* which concerns Bloody Sunday in Derry, and was directed by Albert Finney.<sup>168</sup> The play follows three Civil Rights protesters who mistakenly find themselves in the Mayor's Parlour in the city's Guildhall, only for their presence to be interpreted as an 'occupation'. The play considers their failed escape and the tribunal into their deaths. Aware of the delicate and potentially litigious and even violent reprisals the play might prompt, Lewenstein had his solicitors read the play before advancing with the production.<sup>169</sup> In his letter to the lawyers of Feb. 13<sup>th</sup>, 1973, Lewenstein refers to the city as 'Londonderry'; this appellation is the British name for the city and an objectionable term to the native Irish.<sup>170</sup> Lewenstein refers to the city as 'Derry', its original Irish name, in all his other published work, which suggests he was attempting to appease the lawyers to some extent in his use of their term. The play went into production and Garry O'Connor wrote in the *Financial Times*:

Brian Friel has, I think, written the best Northern Irish play so far to be presented since the present troubles began; it is also the least tainted by propaganda or the simplifications to which such a subject becomes prone, in the playwright's desire to treat an urgent and contemporary subject. (Lewenstein, 1994: 150)

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<sup>167</sup> The lower social class of the Ulster Protestants contrasts with that of the Anglo-Irish Protestants who were largely of the Anglican faith and were a smaller population more dispersed around Ireland; the Anglo-Irish tended to be middle to upper-middle class.

<sup>168</sup> On January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1972, Following a peaceful Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association march calling for equal rights for the native Catholic population, and in which the playwright Friel took part, the British 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Parachute Regiment opened fire on the unarmed protesters which resulted in thirteen deaths, with another man later dying of his wounds.

<sup>169</sup> Correspondence regarding *The Freedom of the City* by Brian Friel, English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/4/1/98).

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

The majority of British notices were not positive, a fact which Lewenstein said was down to their chauvinism in the face of criticism of the British Army. Lewenstein claimed there were even bomb scares at the Court itself and the Court did poor business on this play (ibid). The Chairman of the Arts Council, Patrick Gibson, wrote to Lewenstein on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1973, expressing his concerns about the play which he admits he had not yet seen, and enclosing particular comments made on March 7<sup>th</sup> by an unnamed member of the Arts Council who had seen the play and whose opinions Gibson says are supported by two further Arts Council members who had also attended the play. The unnamed member states:

*The Freedom of the City* was a bitter disappointment and I speak as an old friend and admirer of the Royal Court....This old stereotype of the carefree Irish working class gunned down by the stupid English middle class is so boring that it is not surprising that a lot of people left at the interval.<sup>171</sup>

Replying to Gibson on March 14<sup>th</sup>, the following day, in particular regard to the views of the unnamed Arts Council member, Lewenstein politely emphasises the Court's focus on controversial issues and remains firm:

Clearly you will not expect me to agree with his views. Opinion is divided as to the merits of this play as it usually is with all plays presented at the Royal Court. I am sure you will agree that this is in the nature of the policy we pursue here.<sup>172</sup>

Gibson subsequently penned a letter to the Secretary of the English Stage Company, Greville Poke, on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1973, in which he says he has since been to see Friel's play and implies that there may be negative impact on the Court's funding should more work of this ilk be programmed:

I went to see *The Freedom on the City* on Monday night. I thought there were some good performances in it but that it was a pretty indifferent play. If that were the normal level of the Royal Court I would not personally think it worth subsidy, but fortunately that is not the case! (ibid).

Poke annotated the letter in red ink 'Dear Oscar, I think this letter is even more disturbing' (ibid). The reaction to this play by the Arts Council is extraordinary. Correspondence such as this illuminates a continuance of an anti-Irish sentiment in Britain, particularly within the

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<sup>171</sup> Correspondence regarding *The Freedom of the City* by Brian Friel, English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/4/1/98).

<sup>172</sup> ibid.

establishment. Meanwhile, Friel was sufficiently irked by the notices in the British press and impressed enough by the Court production to write to the company:

There are certain imperfections in the critics, (to paraphrase a classic) this I do not deny. Nor do I deny them the right to applaud my play with one hand. But when they ignore – as so many of them did – the wonderful work of the cast and director, then I know they have been less than fair. Because all of you and Albert did a great job; and I was deeply moved by you and was proud and grateful to you. You worked with great generosity, skill, assurance and intelligence and if there's a better way, or truer way of realising the text, I'd walk to Delhi to see it.<sup>173</sup>

The play did not do well at the box office, selling only 45% of seats.<sup>174</sup> Whether or not this reaction by the press, public and Arts Council had an impact on the programming of Irish work thereafter, can only be supposition. When director Alfie Lynch made enquiries regarding a production of Haire's recently-completed play *The Bloom on the Diamond Stone* in June of that year, Lewenstein replied to say that, because of the large number of Irish works shown at the Court recently, he could not present this play before the following year at the latest, although he does offer to inform the Abbey Theatre in Dublin of Lynch's interest in directing. Lewenstein did not programme another Irish play until Haire's *Echoes from a Concrete Canyon* in 1975.<sup>175</sup>

Lewenstein's championing of native Irish work and plays by writers from other minority groups was not universally welcomed by the old guard at the Court, as Nicholas Wright recalls:

At the time [Lewenstein] was seen unfavourably, as a money-man. He had indeed made a lot of money, though he was far from cynical; the projects he produced were always ones he was sincerely passionate about. John Osborne disparagingly said at the time of Oscar's directorship that you couldn't get anything on at the Court unless you were Irish, Jewish or Black. It was an exaggeration of course, but it's true that Oscar weighed the programming in favour of the unheeded sections of society and that this was deliberate on his part. He brought in ethnic playwrights because he felt it was the right thing to do.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Correspondence regarding *The Freedom of the City* by Brian Friel, English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/4/1/98).

<sup>174</sup> An inventory of the percentage of seats sold titled 'Oscar Lewenstein First Year Royal Court', dated Dec. 27<sup>th</sup>, 1973. Donald Howarth's personal archive, Hammersmith.

<sup>175</sup> Correspondence regarding *The Bloom on the Diamond Stone* by Wilson John Haire, English Stage Company (Royal Court) collection, Blythe House, London (ref: THM/273/4/13/7)

<sup>176</sup> Nicholas Wright, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Notting Hill, London.

### 3.9 Conclusion

An astute business sense that recognised the commercial potential of alternative theatre may have helped Lewenstein to promote shows such as *The Rocky Horror Show*, yet, as Wright states, much of his programming also stemmed from the fact that Lewenstein's personal convictions dovetailed with contemporary trends in theatre making. Lewenstein was determined to promote work from less heeded sections of society, not because it was suddenly fashionable, but because he felt a moral obligation to do so. Lewenstein appeared to want to bring the focus of the Court back closer to Devine's maxim of needing to build a theatre of social concern – and that social concern for Lewenstein was more associated with minority, less heeded and under-privileged groups. It was the Court's fortune that Lewenstein's strides in that area were also part of a growing movement.

In the wider theatrical landscape, the social and political tumult of 1968-1972 had given rise to a widespread promotion of ethnic and sexual diversity in theatre-making, and the emergence and flowering of alternative theatre (Wandor, 1993: 13). Trussler holds that the emergence of an alternative theatre could be seen not only as a response to, but also as an organic part of, the movement for social and political change (Trussler, 1981: xii). In concert with his view, Itzin states a characteristic of the political theatre movement in the 1970s was the extent to which the flourishing of new writing coincided with the growth of alternative theatre companies, and was also often consequent of its growing popularity. Juxtaposed with this revolution in theatre-making, the Court pre-Lewenstein appears anachronistic with Sloane Square giving prominence to work like Osborne's *West of Suez* which looked back with nostalgia on the British Empire. Even critics were noting a tendency to favour established writers and actors, and believed the theatre had grown somehow tired. Sloane Square was becoming more 'of' than 'anti' the establishment.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> *Plays and Players*, October, 1971.

Those closely associated with the Court were possibly too intertwined with the internal culture and habitus of the Court to identify the real issue setting the Court apart from new directions in theatre. The emergent playwrights of the 1970s blamed a lack of support for their work. The triumvirate management quarreled amongst themselves, whilst other Court employees blamed a commercial direction they felt the Court was taking. A letter of protest was submitted to management signed by Court staff who complained of what they perceived as a commercialisation of the Court, stating that the theatre ‘should not be a try out theatre for Shaftsbury Avenue’. The letter, dated Dec. 8<sup>th</sup>, 1971, was signed by Gillian Diamond, E.A. Whitehead, Jonathan Hales, Pam Brighton, Andy Philips and Harriet Cruickshank and raised ‘a growing concern at the number of Royal Court productions which appear in many respects to be designed for the West End’.<sup>178</sup> Contemporaneous external comment recognised some of the progressions Lewenstein was instigating at the Court, though largely failed to applaud all or understand the thrust of his actions and comprehend how it was recalibrating the Court with trends in theatre-making. *The Stage* bestowed somewhat ambiguous praise regarding the South African season. On the one hand, the publication states ‘the season will shine gloriously in the history of the English Stage Company,’ then add that the play ‘helps to restore dignity to the theatre and also to the man himself,’ a statement which implies Lewenstein had made some undignified programme choices prior to this season.<sup>179</sup>

Lewenstein attempted, with a marked degree of success, to introduce a multi-cultural aspect to a progressive theatre in post-imperial times. Lewenstein felt the Court had an obligation to provide a hearing to those denied it. In his autobiography, he quotes the sociologist and associate of Devine and Richardson, George W. Goetschius who asks in his 1966 article on ‘The Royal Court and its Social Context’:

As a theater of social concern, should it attempt to locate in contemporary society some group in need of a hearing and set about becoming its champion in the way in which it once became the champion of the needs of the new middle classes? (Goetschius, 1966 in Lewenstein, 1994: 148).

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<sup>178</sup> Donald Howarth’s personal archive, Lower Mall, Hammersmith.

<sup>179</sup> *The Stage*, Donald Howarth’s personal archive, Lower Mall, Hammersmith.



Goetschius was an American who had been indirectly involved with the establishment of the English Stage Company. He lived at Devine's house on Lower Mall in Hammersmith, firstly with Richardson and later with his life partner, Howarth. In their forty-sixth year together, Howarth and Goetschius became civil partners on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2006, weeks following the introduction of the Civil Partnership law. Goetschius had been one of the first to read Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and, according to Howarth, it was his enthusiasm for the play which emboldened Devine and Richardson to stage it. As a sociologist, Goetschius understood the class dynamics at the Court, and specifically that it was predominantly a middle-class institution. His thoughts are echoed in McGrath's comment on the Court's activity between 1956-1970. McGrath stated that he believes plays at the Court depicting proletarian life were not so much an expression of a new working class, but of an old middle class trying to renew itself (McGrath, 1981: 18). Goetschius wrote further in 1966:

The success of the Court I would attribute to its allowing itself after *Look Back in Anger* to become one of the rallying points for those elements in the middle-class who were attempting to clear the social scene of what they saw to be some of its impediments and irrelevancies. In this sense the Court was a theatre of middle-class transition. (Goetschius 1966: 33; Motton, 2009: 107; Little, McLaughlin: 28)

Lewenstein went against the grain as he did not provide the expectant middle class male English writers the monopoly on the Court stage they may have expected. Instead, he operated in accordance with what he believed to be the correct and original objective of the Court, to give a platform to erstwhile less heeded voices, to women, to immigrant writers, playwrights from the former colonies who wrote plays about post-colonial experiences and colonial injustices, who were affording their own culture an artistic attention that had often been denied, largely under British occupation. It was a stance which chimed with the zeitgeist and was in dialogue with a country coming to terms with its imperialist past.

It is baffling that, with Lewenstein's track record in promoting subaltern and non-British playwrights, having already championed a range of talents from Brecht to Behan, and his keenness for socialist plays, that his co-workers at the Court appeared to have expected him to take a passive, non-interventionist role as Artistic Director. His long

association with the Court perhaps calmed nerves in tumultuous times. Lewenstein had been a founder of the company, was Co-Chairman, had had a successful career as a theatre and film producer and was willing to retain Gaskill, Page and Anderson as Associates. For these reasons, many key Court figures appear to have thought he would make for a steady and safe pair of hands. A telephone conversation with Richardson regarding Lewenstein as a potential Artistic Director, produces the note from the January 27<sup>th</sup> council meeting, 'Good idea... not the ultimate authority in artistic matters... not creative... not to have final power' (Roberts 1999: 141). Greville Poke stated in an interview with Philip Roberts that 'Lewenstein came in with a very down to earth practical programme. I don't think he ever pretended that he was going to direct a play' (ibid). Harewood referred to him as a 'known quantity' who would exert a 'benign depotism' over the Court's affairs (Roberts 1999: 142). There were some dissenters. Peter Gill commented that he didn't think an administrator ought to run a theatre (ibid). Gaskill states in his autobiography that he had one last thought about the possibility of starting again as Artistic Director single-handed, but decided it would not have worked (Gaskill, 1988: 130).

Nicholas Wright has posited that resistance to Lewenstein was comprised partly of anti-Semitism and partly a snobbery regarding the commercial theatre to which he was attached (Roberts, 1999: 144). In an interview in May 2016, Wright further considered the voices against Lewenstein's appointment, adding that there were a number of reasons why Lewenstein was not considered suitable by key figures in the Court's establishment. In his words:

[Lewenstein] was horribly patronised by Lindsay Anderson and Tony Richardson. There were Jewish figures involved with the Royal Court board, such as the long-serving Chairman Neville Blond. However, they were all Zionists and Oscar was anti-Zionist. Being an orthodox Marxist, he disapproved of Nationalism and refused to donate to Israel during the Six-Day War.... Bill, Lindsay, Anthony, Jocelyn, they didn't approve of his appointment at all. There was a feeling almost of outrage. Remember that, before Oscar, the theatre had always been run by a theatre director, which Oscar was not.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Nicholas Wright, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, May 16th, 2016, Notting Hill, London.

Anderson did initially support the proposal of Lewenstein, in fact, although he would later be very vocal in his opposition to Lewenstein's programming. And, having been instrumental in appointing Lewenstein, Anderson then spent the next few years focused on getting him out (he was to do likewise in the case of Lewenstein's successors Kidd and Wright). Anderson himself later commented:

I think that we tended to think that Oscar would be the director of the theatre, employing a strong Artistic Committee. Oscar plainly thought otherwise and Oscar was determined to be the Artistic Director of the theatre and in our estimate this proved a mistake. Oscar's ambitions overreached his capacity. He had it in his grasp to be the manager of quite a strong Royal Court, but he wanted to have it for him to be the Artistic Director. (Roberts, 1999: 143)

When Lewenstein proved to be an active Artistic Director, placing his own stamp on programming, it caused a degree of consternation both from the old guard and from the new generation of emerging playwrights. Negative commentary on the era appears to bemoan the fact that Lewenstein's tenure was not the insignificant 'bridging regime' or 'stopgap artistic director' (Hare, 2015:175) they had anticipated and wanted, and ironically that the received narrative would later claim it was.<sup>181</sup>

Lewenstein's years in charge of the Court came to an end in the summer of 1975. Lord Harewood wrote to Anderson: 'I think the leadership must in future be artistic as it is really chimerical to think it can ever normally come from the chair' (Roberts, 1999: 147). Herbert wanted a sub-committee to seek out possible replacements. On June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1975, the council was told that Lewenstein did not wish to continue in his position. The Court invited applications to replace Lewenstein. The November edition of *Plays and Players* that year satirised the advert for a new Artistic Director with the observation that a new regime must be, 'sufficiently radical to ensure both a continuation of the fading prestige of the Royal Court as a home for the best new British writing and a clean break with the shadow of the previous administrations' (Roberts, 1999: 148). Howarth was invited to apply and was later called for interview. He proposed further diversifying the Court's management:

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<sup>181</sup> Max Stafford-Clark, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, March 29<sup>th</sup> 2016, Out of Joint Offices, Finsbury Park, London.

I said I'd been working in South Africa and I had come back home and found it was not much different. I said we have our own version of apartheid here, that there were no black members on the Artistic Committee and us whites made all the decisions. I said I would like to mix things up a bit.<sup>182</sup>

He was not offered the position. The playwright Bond wrote to Poke on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1975, citing a need for someone who could easily become part of the fabric of the Court, stating he was 'certain we should choose someone who has trained at the Court or worked there long enough to have soaked in its atmosphere. I'm sure we don't need anyone from outside' (Roberts, 1999: 148). Due in part to seeds sown by Lewenstein, the Court went on to become a venue celebrated for its championing of outsiders, the female voice, and subaltern sections of the community.

It is Lewenstein's fostering of marginalised talent which is his legacy. He gave less heeded playwrights – ethnic, non-white, immigrant and female – a main platform and a fair, for its time, percentage of the main stage time. The introduction of their work augmented and gave greater depth and texture to later work at the Court and brought the institution more in line with wider trends in theatre-making. It can be seen that by focusing on supporting dramatists from hitherto under-represented sections of society, Lewenstein empowered the voice of outsiders and challenged an ingrained insularity in British theatre.

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<sup>182</sup> Donald Howarth, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, Feb. 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Lower Mall, Hammersmith.

## Conclusion

In 1981, twenty-five years after the Court's genesis, a group of young white middle class English theatre-makers including Hare, Stafford-Clark, Edgar and Wilson gave various interviews in which they presented their views on the history of the Court, paying particular attention to the 1970s when they had first engaged with the theatre. By this time, these directors and dramatists had become established figures in British theatre and, perhaps emboldened by this surer status, their commentary on the early 1970s shifted notably from what had been a broadly positive assessment in interviews they had given at the time, to retrospectively delivering a negative view of the era. By the Court's quarter century, they were describing the early to mid-1970s as a time when the Court had lost its way, a moment when, in their view, the institution had not delivered the support which they felt they were due. These emerging playwrights laid the blame on this alleged lack of platform for their work on a generational wrangle and what they described as a 'humanist' versus 'political' divide within the theatre at that time in regard to artistic praxis (Hare in Findlater, 1981: 145). These alleged tensions were, they attested, to the detriment of the Court as they had arrested the theatre's advance and had compromised its reputation. These theatre makers were resentful of what they perceived had been the Court's unwillingness to prioritise their work at this time.

As this research demonstrates, these claims of a fallow era at the Court, a generational power-wrangle with related divisions regarding approaches to theatre-making, do not stand up to close interrogation. At the very least, these comments are significantly exaggerated, and occasionally entirely erroneous. Contrary to the views of these white middle-class male English playwrights, examination of primary evidence reveals that the early to mid-1970s at the Court was an exciting, progressive and pioneering time. This was an era in which the Court, which had been rooted in an empire-era mind-set and in ethnic and gender homogeneity, finally challenged that culture and the theatre became an active participant in the social change and radical political advancements that were occurring more

broadly at this time. At the Court, this progression manifested in the promotion of female and subaltern playwrights who were finally given a prominent voice, stage space and standing at the Sloane Square institution. Thus, the early to mid-1970s was a time when the Court recalibrated with the times, rather than the contrary as suggested by the received narrative. Moreover, although this period did not especially give undue prominence to the work of the aforementioned group of young white male middle-class English playwrights, evidence demonstrates that they were provided with far more support than they have subsequently recognised or ever later admitted.

The lack of academic focus or any significant degree of scholarly scrutiny of facts, or consideration of motives and reasons, has resulted in an unsatisfactory scenario wherein scholarship on this specific era at the Court has consistently relied on unsubstantiated claims, opinion and hearsay supplied by these emerging playwrights who were also invested parties in the narrative insofar as their own legacy is invariably elevated and granted more importance in their interpretation of events. Their commentary ought to have been treated in scholarship as unreliably subjective and checked against primary source evidence. There is little evidence of this occurring as the views of this privileged group were reported verbatim by the majority of key texts published on the Court since its launch. Ironically, the act of privileging this white male middle-class English perception of the Court's history is directly related to the specific empire-era culture which was being challenged by the Court in the 1970s. As a result of reliance on works including Little and McLaughlin, H. Devine, Doty and Harbin, Roberts and Browne, which report the opinions of this biased group, the dubious recollections of these privileged theatre-makers have cemented to become the accepted history of the theatre during this era.

The implications of this lack of scholarly attention regarding the early to mid-1970s have been considered and reflected upon in this study, and the pitfalls of this neglect are noted. By not allocating due credit to Lewenstein for his contribution to the advancement of the female and subaltern voice at the Court, other subsequent artistic directorships – white, middle-class English and male all – were lauded and accorded sole credit for advancements

that were not entirely theirs to claim. It is a situation that has created tricky false legacies and a regretful marginalising of more meritorious ones.

A notable example of how such an oversight and mis-accreditation has had far reaching consequences which touch the present moment, is the failure by scholars to duly consider Lewenstein's role in the advancement of the female voice at the Court. As this study highlights, Lewenstein's introduction to the Court of Churchill, O'Brien and O'Malley has been overlooked, as has that of Lewenstein's general elevation of the female presence within the structure of the Court. In contrast, it is Stafford-Clark, Artistic Director in the 1980s, who has been almost uniquely associated with the introduction and elevation of Churchill's work at the Court. His support of female writers at the Court is widely celebrated and recognised, particularly his promotion of Churchill's work. Thus, Lewenstein's significant, and for the time, more daring efforts in this specific area, have been diminished by Stafford-Clark's somewhat exaggerated reputation. The inflation of Stafford-Clark's pioneering stance regarding the advancement of the female playwrights at the Court has in turn facilitated and given ballast to a narrative of the director as a significant champion of female dramatists in general, whilst the narrative pertaining to Lewenstein's progressions in this area conversely fades.<sup>183</sup>

The Oxbridge-educated elite who influenced and were influenced by the institutional habitus of the Court of the era have seen their reputations inflated by subsequent publications on the theatre, where Lewenstein's has been neglected, dismissed

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<sup>183</sup> This elevation of Stafford-Clark's reputation as a champion of female playwrights recently led to some awkwardness for the Court. In October and November 2017, it emerged that there had been serious allegations of inappropriate conduct and lewd comments by Stafford-Clark directed towards women in the employ of his theatre company. It subsequently emerged that the director's behaviour was to blame for his recent departure from Out of Joint, a theatre company he had founded in 1993. Further allegations going back several decades were to follow in the national press, bringing the number of accusers to five women, including the established actor Tracy-Ann Oberman. Stafford-Clark had been the Court's longest-serving Artistic Director and his association with the Court remained close; before leaving Out of Joint in September 2017, Stafford-Clark had been due to direct a revival of Andrea Dunbar's *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1982) at the Court in January 2018. Within weeks of these allegations Vicky Featherstone, the current Artistic Director of the Court, moved to publicly announce a theatre industry-wide 'Code of Behaviour' to prevent sexual harassment and abuses of power. Stafford-Clark did not ultimately direct the revival of Dunbar's play, which was briefly withdrawn but then reinstated in the Court's 2018 season, with Kate Wasserberg directing.

and occasionally maligned. In the interests of theatre history, it is important to measure frankly and accurately Lewenstein's notable achievements and his significant contributions to the Court's history. This thesis provides an alternative understanding of the institution during the 1968-1975 era, and contributes a positive reassessment and new reading of this time, and Lewenstein in particular. By confronting the occlusion of Lewenstein's achievements and identifying the specific reasons his actions may have been overlooked, and the subsequent impact of this occlusion, the imbalance is redressed. This study further illuminates a need for avoiding an over-reliance on verbatim interviews and the pitfalls of privileging the views of an invested demographic when researching the history of an institution. The failure to recognise and identify this problem to date, or to accord due attention to the attempts made by Lewenstein in the 1970s to dismantle this specific culture at the Court or the institutional habitus therein, has meant that the imperial era mind-set at the institution has not yet been adequately interrogated by scholars, or considered and reflected upon by the Sloane Square institution.

It is true that impressive advances were made at the Court in the 1980s regarding the percentage of female work on the Court's stage, albeit due in part to the seed sowing by Lewenstein. Such advances facilitated the emergence and elevation of the significant talents of playwrights such as Churchill, Kane and Tucker Green. With the arrival of Daldry as Artistic Director in 1992, and later his Literary Manager Graham Whybrow, these progressions were solidified and progressed. The Court has continued to build on these advances in the first two decades of the new millennium, under the directorships of Ian Rickson, Dominic Cooke and later Vicky Featherstone, respectively.

A roster of native Irish talent was also promoted to prominence during the 1990s and 2000s, including Barry, Carr, McDonagh, McPherson and Walsh.<sup>184</sup> Also in 1996, the Royal Court International Programme was founded to source new voices in other countries

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<sup>184</sup> Although London-born, Martin McDonagh is the son of native Irish immigrants to the U.K., who eventually returned to their native Ireland. This generational remove is significant nonetheless. His work has drawn criticism for stage-Irishry.



and bring their stories to London. This significant programme was headed by Elyse Dodgson up until her death in October 2018, and has supported work from lands and cultures as far as China, Palestine, Zimbabwe and Argentina, and many more. In 2013, theatre director Featherstone became the Court's first female Artistic Director and is *in situ* at the time of writing. In the autumn of 2017, the International Programme at the Court had a particularly high-profile season which included work from the war-torn countries of Ukraine and Syria. The July 10<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Stage* that year commends the Court on its upcoming season of which two third of the writers and directors are female, and the theatre is also to receive a touring production of *Black Men Walking* (2018) by a black rapper, Testament.<sup>185</sup> There have clearly been great advances made at the Court in terms of inclusivity since the early 1970s.

Occasionally, however, remnants of an empire-era habitus can still be discerned at the Sloane Square theatre, as is demonstrated by one recently-programmed 'Irish' play. In April 2017, the Court premiered a new play by the English playwright Jez Butterworth, *The Ferryman* (2017). The production was met with standing ovations, immediate critical acclaim from English critics and five star consensus in the British press. Its subsequent transfer to the West End, and further life on Broadway, where it opened at the Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre, New York, in October 2018, has ensured an ongoing commercial success.<sup>186</sup> The play is set in Northern Ireland in 1981 during the time of the Hunger Strikes and it regards a 'sleeping' IRA member whose brother was 'disappeared' by the IRA some ten years previously. The play features Irish music, jigs, story-telling, a large cast including a corrupt Catholic priest, seven young 'steps-of-stairs' children who drink whiskey for breakfast, a fey and demented aunt who hears ghosts, menacing IRA paramilitaries, a martyr mother, firebrand IRA supporters, banshees [sic] and the aforementioned conflicted IRA

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<sup>185</sup> Bano, T. 'Women directors dominate at the Court in 2018', *The Stage*, July, 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017. See: <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2017/women-writers-directors-dominate-new-royal-court-season/> [accessed Dec. 28th, 2017]

<sup>186</sup> Hemley, M. 'The Ferryman to close in the West End ahead of Broadway transfer', *The Stage*, Feb. 9th, 2018. See: <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2018/ferryman-close-west-end-ahead-broadway-transfer/> [accessed Feb. 9th, 2018].

sleeper.<sup>187</sup> English critic Susanna Clapp of *The Guardian* incongruously praised the play for making, ‘skittles out of the near-stereotypes with caustic comedy’. Her comment is indicative of how little understanding the play’s English audience has of how this play appears to the Irish people it purports to represent.<sup>188</sup>

Examining *The Ferryman* in the broader context of the Irish response to the play raises discussion centered around cultural appropriation and the attitudes of colonialism. It puts a focus on the extent to which the native Irish canon, from which Butterworth borrows heavily, and particularly the works of Murphy, O’Casey and Friel, is viewed and understood by English critics and playwrights. The play’s programming at the Court further evinces questions surrounding the integrity of an overwhelmingly English production providing a condensed, near music hall tour of ‘the Troubles’. It was some months before the English applause died down in Britain and a dissenting voice emerged in the British press and finally, it was an Irish one. Journalist Seán O’Hagan highlighted in his piece in *The Guardian* that, in the opinion of that Irish audience member, the play makes for uncomfortable viewing.<sup>189</sup> It is a feeling I also experienced upon seeing this play on its first night preview at the Court. The play elicits, promulgates and encourages an array of English prejudices, stereotypes and skewed perceptions of Ireland and the Irish. O’Hagan’s article illuminates the fact that the play is populated with every Irish cliché, and that it is unrepresentative, misinformed and mildly offensive.

Two of Butterworth’s grandparents were native Irish Catholics, both of whom settled in England in their youth, married English people and raised their respective families, Butterworth’s parents, in England. Butterworth is clearly sympathetic towards

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<sup>187</sup> The banshee (‘*an Ban Sí*’, literally translates as ‘the fairy woman’) is an individual character in Irish folklore. Her wail foretells a death in the family. A single character, the banshee is never referred to in plural – similarly to ‘Father Christmas’. Butterworth’s use of a plural is one illustration of his lack of familiarity with Irish culture.

<sup>188</sup> Clapp, S. ‘The Ferryman review – Jez Butterworth pulls another rabbit from the hat’, *The Guardian*, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/may/07/ferryman-royal-court-jez-butterworth-review-magic> [accessed on Dec. 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017]

<sup>189</sup> O’Hagan, S. ‘Critics loved The Ferryman. But I’m from Northern Ireland, and it doesn’t ring true’, *The Guardian*, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jul/16/jez-butterworth-the-ferryman-irish-stereotypes-sam-mendes> [accessed on Dec. 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017]

Ireland and has a strong interest in Irish drama which can be discerned from influences in his work. Butterworth's partner is the Irish actor Laura Donnelly who played 'Caitlin' in the play. He has said the idea for *The Ferryman* was percolating in his mind for decades and gained traction in 2012 when Donnelly learned that her uncle, Eugene, had been one of the 'disappeared' in 'the Troubles'.<sup>190</sup> Butterworth's personal background is significantly culturally, ethnically and generationally removed from the reality of Ireland and the Irish experience, however. His interpretation and understanding of that country is markedly received in character, often inaccurate and distinctly English in perspective. The English critical reaction to the play has shown similar traits; in her review, Clapp says of the sole English character in the play 'he might be Charon, ferrying souls across the River Styx. Perhaps that is what the Irish think of the English.'<sup>191</sup> It is not. What the Irish think of the English cannot be discerned from this play as there was no senior Irish artistic involvement in its creation: it is an English work by an English playwright exploring a dramatic tradition adjacent to, but distinct from, Butterworth's own. It is concerning therefore to read statements such as Vanessa Thorpe's in the *Observer* labelling *The Ferryman* an 'Irish play':

The play joins the canon of Irish drama, from Seán O'Casey's *The Shadow of a Gunman*, through Brendan Behan, to the work of Martin McDonagh, Enda Walsh and Conor McPherson.<sup>192</sup>

On the contrary, as O'Hagan the Irishman comments more astutely in his opinion piece in the *Guardian* 'it is a play that reveals more about English attitudes to Ireland.'<sup>193</sup> *The*

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<sup>190</sup> Armistead, C. 'The Ferryman's Laura Donnelly on how her uncle's murder inspired the IRA drama', *The Guardian*, Aug. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/aug/08/laura-donnelly-the-ferryman-jez-butterworth-paddy-considine> [accessed on Feb. 8, 2018].

<sup>191</sup> Clapp, S. 'The Ferryman review – Jez Butterworth pulls another rabbit from the hat', *The Guardian*, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/may/07/ferryman-royal-court-jez-butterworth-review-magic> [accessed on Dec. 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017]

<sup>192</sup> Thorpe, V. 'Jez Butterworth: the visionary fast becoming a theatrical great', *The Guardian*, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

See: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/may/06/jez-butterworth-visionary-fast-becoming-theatrical-great-ferryman-royal-court> [accessed on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018]

<sup>193</sup> O'Hagan, S. 'Critics loved *The Ferryman*. But I'm from Northern Ireland, and it doesn't ring true', *The Guardian*, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

See: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jul/16/jez-butterworth-the-ferryman-irish-stereotypes-sam-mendes> [accessed on Dec. 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017]

*Ferryman* is, in fact, in the tradition of English plays on Ireland, a category which includes the collaboratively written *England's Ireland*, penned by a group of emergent 1970s Court playwrights, amongst them Hare, Edgar and Brenton.

It appears an anachronism that an English theatre would produce a play about and set in Ireland written by an Englishman and subsequently pair this English playwright with an English director, Sam Mendes, and then cast an English actor, Paddy Considine, in the lead for its *début*, in London. This fact also raises questions surrounding who the intended audience of the play was, and for what end. An 'Irish play' is a product that the Court would have understood to have significant American audience potential, as Broadway has always been very receptive to Irish plays due to New York's large Irish-American population.

Publicly at least, there did not appear to be any concerns at the Court nor in the British press that the play's links to Ireland and the Irish were tenuous. Nor was there any discernible debate in the English press centred around the ethics of bringing a play to the stage that claimed to represent Ireland, or even an English version of Ireland, without having invited any senior Irish artistic input such as a partnership with the Abbey Theatre or Druid of Galway, both of which the Court has partnered previously. There was no evident consideration of whether such action could be construed as unseemly cultural appropriation for financial gain by an English theatre. That there was an absence of such public discussion implies that there remains at the Court, to some degree, an acceptance of cultural appropriation and a lack of concern regarding the misinterpretation and misrepresentation of another culture, and thus, there is still a residual unwillingness and/or inability to acknowledge or recognise the inappropriateness of such actions.

The lack of conversation and the absence of recognition that such discussion might be merited, is disheartening and suggests that, to some degree, there still exists at the Sloane Square institution a mentality worryingly reminiscent of the early 1970s, and by extension, the days of empire and colonialism. It was a strange and insular decision on the part of the Court not to invite senior Irish collaboration on this project, such as hire an Irish director, or indeed commission a play from an Irish playwright, or cast an Irishman in the lead in the

first instance. It was also unnecessary as there is a disproportionately large number of talented and experienced and celebrated Irish theatre professionals on hand in London alone.

Plays tend to reveal the temperature of their time, often unwittingly and frequently indirectly. *The Ferryman* was programmed in 2016, the year the UK voted to leave the EU, as the result of a referendum which some commentators have suggested stemmed in part from a nostalgia for a Britain in the time of empire. It is significant that *The Ferryman* followed the key success at the Court the previous year of *Hangman* (2015) by the London-Irish playwright Martin McDonagh. *Hangman* is an Orton-esque farcical play which presents the Britain of 1966, the year of the last English World Cup win, an imagined world of a pre-EU, homogenous, mono-cultural, smoky-pub England. The popularity of *The Ferryman* and *Hangman* at the Court helps here to illuminate why the key research questions of this thesis regarding insularity, nostalgia, the empire and its psychological and cultural legacy at the Court, and more broadly in society, are of current relevance. In a wider context still, viewing *The Ferryman* in this respect may provide a way of re-examining the Irish border in the fresh context of Brexit's cultural fault lines.

Considering Lewenstein's track record at the Court in the early to mid-1970s, his promotion and inclusion of marginalised voices, it is unlikely that he would ever have allowed a project such as *The Ferryman* at the Court without significant and senior Irish involvement, whether in the form of an Irish playwright, or director, or lead actor, or dramaturg or partner co-producing theatre. Lewenstein showed the way to achieve theatre of integrity by facilitating minorities to tell their own stories directly without the need to turn to a white middle-class Englishman to act as an intermediary. Lewenstein discouraged the appropriation of stories or of culture, particularly by a privileged demographic, but instead made efforts to partner, nurture and encourage artists from diverse social groups and endeavoured to ensure that works shown at the Court were what Lewenstein viewed as authentic. Resultingly, works programmed during Lewenstein's tenure did not tend to offend the demographics they claimed to represent.

In terms of Court history, the foci of scholarship and Court marketing has tended to be on the 1950s, 1990s and 1980s, in that particular order. If the Court could accord equal importance and similar respect to Lewenstein's years, in the same manner it lauds the rebelliousness of the 'kitchen sink' and 'in-yer-face' eras, the Sloane Square theatre may establish a more present reminder of how to better promote, develop and programme inclusive theatre. Due attention and respect accorded to Lewenstein's legacy could also provide a beneficial addition to informed discourse and debate regarding the theatre's drive to involve practitioners from diverse backgrounds. The rationale behind this thesis highlights the dangers of providing preferential treatment to a narrative offered by an elite and invested group, and the risks of not questioning an institutional habitus that favours them, whether in theatre production and programming, or in scholarship and academic research.

The Court has made commendable advancements regarding diversity and inclusiveness since Lewenstein sowed those seeds in the 1970s. Yet, to ensure these progressions continue apace, the theatre would benefit from regularly assessing whether their programme is providing a direct platform for groups in need of a hearing. By including theatre-artists directly associated with the subject matter at hand, the Court will remain a leading destination for bold theatre of social concern.

## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Interviews

Below is an alphabetised list of individuals with whom I conducted interviews as part of the research for this PhD. The appendix lists their names, their particular connection to the subject of this study, along with the location and date(s) that the interview(s) took place.

Margaretta D’Arcy, playwright and activist, unpublished interview with Sue Healy via email and telephone, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

Elyse Dodgson, Director of the Royal Court Theatre’s International Programme, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Royal Court Theatre, London.

Athol Fugard, playwright, unpublished interview with Sue Healy via email, Feb. 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017.

David Gothard, director and producer and former trainee at the Royal Court Theatre, unpublished interview with Sue Healy June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Pimlico, London.

Jim Haynes, leading counter culture figure in London in the late 1960s, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Montparnasse, Paris.

Donald Howarth, playwright, director and former Literary Manager at the Royal Court Theatre, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, Sept. 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015 and Feb. 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Lower Mall, Hammersmith, London.

Max Stafford-Clark, director and Artistic Director of the Royal Court Theatre 1979-1993, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Out of Joint Offices, Finsbury Park, London

Nicholas Wright, playwright, director and former co-Artistic Director of the Royal Court Theatre, unpublished interview with Sue Healy, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Notting Hill, London.

**Appendix B**

English Stage Company (Royal Court) Collection, Blythe House, London

THM/273/1/5/11

THM/273/1/5/12

THM/273/1/6/1

THM/273/4/1/64

THM/273/4/1/71

THM/273/4/1/75

THM/273/4/1/76

THM/273/4/1/78

THM/273/4/1/83

THM/273/4/1/87

THM/273/4/1/88

THM/273/4/1/91

THM/273/4/1/95

THM/273/4/1/98

THM/273/4/1/101

THM/273/4/1/103

THM/273/4/1/106

THM/273/4/1/110

THM/273/6/1/93

THM/273/7/2/305

THM/273/7/2/334

THM/273/4/13/7



## Appendix C

Donald Howarth's extensive personal archive is housed at his home at 9 Lower Mall, Hammersmith. The house is the former home of key Court figures George Devine and Tony Richardson. The archive consists of a wealth of material relating to both Howarth and the Royal Court Theatre. The following documents pertain to this study and are a tiny sample of this archive.

Postcard from Samuel Beckett to Donald Howarth, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1980.

Letter from Anderson to the council members of the English Stage Company, May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

Letter from Anderson to Lewenstein, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994.

'Choose your theatre as you would your Temple'. Unpublished article written by George Devine.

Reply from James Robertson & Sons Ltd to Howarth, dated Sept. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1965.

Letter from Lewenstein to Howarth, dated Dec. 6<sup>th</sup> 1974.

Letter of protest submitted to Court management, signed by Court staff, Dec. 8<sup>th</sup>, 1971.

Original rehearsal script for *Play Mas* by Mustapha Matura, Act II, Scene II, p. 2.

*The Daily Express* July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1974 review of *Play Mas*, by Herbert Kretzmer.

*The Financial Times* July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1974 review of *Play Mas*, by B. A. Young.

*The London Evening Standard* July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1974 review of *Play Mas*, by Milton Shulman.

An inventory of the percentage of seats sold titled 'Oscar Lewenstein First Year Royal Court', dated Dec. 27<sup>th</sup>, 1973.

George W. Goetschius 1966 article on 'The Royal Court and its Social Context'.

Buckingham Palace reply to Lois Seiff, Dec. 11<sup>th</sup>, 1969.

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### Photograph

- 1) Times Newspapers Ltd, May 9th, 1971. From left: David Hare, John Osborne, E.A. Whitehead and David Storey. Sloane Square, London.